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"All That Is Solid Melts into Air": Abstraction as Empowerment for the Migrant Mind in the Poetry of Warsan Shire

Abstract: Abstraction as a critical faculty has often been in use in philosophical and critical discourses. The frequency of its usage has often left unconsidered the myriad dimensions of the term pointing to the various centers of contemplation of abstraction. These range from looking at abstraction from the perspective of the invisible and non-deictic to minimalism in art. This paper seeks to explore the question of abstraction in relation to the 'home' and its equivalent terms in the poetry of British-Somali poet Warsan Shire to see how abstraction is a tool of empowering the diasporic identity. In other words, taking recourse to various facets of the term, this essay tries to show that abstraction identified as the absence of the concrete is a form of individual resistance in itself instead of simply being a tool for philosophers to 'interpret the world,' as Marx suggests in the *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach*. In doing so, this paper will also attempt to show how an idea such as dissidence could become qualitatively different in a non-European setting and how collectivist resistance might occlude the unique modes of conception of individual resistance.

Keywords: Abstraction, decontextualization, non-visible, home, host, time, past, future

Introduction

Abstraction, as a faculty of thought, has often been the skeletal theoretical framework of multiple philosophical discourses. Nevertheless, it has come to be used so often that the nuances of various connotations of the same word have passed into oblivion. Besides, as Raymond Williams shows us, the 'abstracted' nature of feeling in art often tends to ignore the particular material context of the production of texts (Williams, qtd. in Longhurst 525). In spite of adopting such a perspective that considers the materialist need for textual abstraction, perhaps a critic of Williams's disposition would not look into the need for abstraction that is rooted in individual urgency/agency irrespective of its collectivist significance. In order to explore this, we first need to consider the discourse of modernism and how a postcolonial writer like Warsan Shire talks about it in the context of migration.

In distinguishing between the terms 'modernity' and 'modernism,' Zygmunt Baumann has an interesting take which, while acknowledging the concurrence of philosophical modernism and technical modernity, pits them against each other as Neil ten Kortenaar writes:

> Baumann sees in twentieth century modernism a recognition of the deformation caused by the project of modernity: modernism marks the moment "when modernity turned the gaze upon itself and attempted to attain clear-sightedness and self-awareness which would eventually decline its impossibility." Thus, Baumann accounts for the affinity felt by Europe's Jews for the project of modernism. (4)

Marshall Berman, the renowned Marxist sociologist, also attempts to recover the value of modernist thought with its sheer propensity for dilution of thoughts to reach perfection whilst being unsettled by the limitations of thoughts. This in fact becomes the defining feature of modernism which, in Marx's own

words is equivalent to the idea that "all that is solid melts into air" (4). The fundamental sincerity characterizing unease and unhomeliness in Modernist predisposition is something to be appreciated in the eyes of these thinkers. One might even claim that the combined interpretation of the aforesaid views points to the movement's philosophical import as an advocacy for abstention from complacency—the idea that no theory posited is worth any concrete share of universal consistency. Needless to say, abstraction itself could play an important role in such formulations. This is so because as a critical gesture, abstraction tends to remove the universalist underpinnings of a proposition placing it in unprecedented and divergent contexts. This shatters the complacency with conceived universalism and points out the fallacies of singular contextualization.

Besides, another point of contention with the Eurocentric perception of Modernist dissidence might arise when the idea is examined under the scanner of migrant issues in post-colonial contexts. While Berman and Bauman celebrate the intellectual callisthenic that the exercise of Modernism brings forth, the instinct for survival and other corollary issues such as trauma associated with migration studies identify dissidence and absence of complacency as fundamental to identity and existence itself. Thus, we are introduced to divergent explanations of the same fastidious gesture that leads to a refutation of complacency. It is with respect to explaining such particular nuances and objectives of abstraction that one could look upon the poetry of the Somali-British poet, Warsan Shire. While Baumann and Berman position modernism clearly as intellectual sincerity, the urgency of dissolution of 'all that is solid' in the case of the poet-narrator in Shire is not derived from a simple intellectual choice but is also premised on the question of survival. To the poetic persona that constantly flees states of despondency from the 'homeland' to the 'hostland,' prolonged attachment to concrete markers of existence is an impossibility. Thus, while the flâneur's detached observations signify a privilege of detached survival, the very compulsion to participate through normative social mores that qualify her survival in the 'hostland' can lead to the migrant individual's resistance to detachment. Thus, unbending attachments to concrete markers of one's identity might in turn endanger the survival of the individual who does not wish to be gazed upon suspiciously in either of the two spaces. The idea of political and collective mobilization to forcibly pursue certain modes of identity formation might simply be overridden by individual conception of what survival entails and what mode of identity formation could help ensure the same. It is in such cases that we begin to realize that our hitherto realization of resistance as collective action was itself achieved through occlusion of individual needs and agency. The realization of the enforcement of collective action helps us comprehend the resistance offered through poetic abstraction. The poet-narrator adopts abstraction as an intellectual trope conveying individuality and resists the urge to prioritize action (collective resistance) over thought. Shire's poetry strategizes such individual negotiations for migrant identities showing how abstraction and speculation are actually empowering agents and steers clear of any apparently empathetic idea of collective resistance through action. The individual needs that fuel such a process of thought will also be addressed in this essay vis-à-vis Shire's poems on the home and her take on time in the poem "Backwards."

Defining Abstraction and Its Complexities

Jeffrey Strayer outlines several methods and ways in which abstraction is viewed in art. Since the focus of this essay is to consider the use of abstraction in Shire's poems, special focus will be given to the discursive formulations of abstract in the realm of aesthetics. If one were to summarize Strayer's discourse on abstraction and its variegated manifestations in art, one would arrive at the conclusion that abstraction is viewed in possibly three ways—namely, abstraction understood as the movement away from full visibility, abstraction as a technique of decontextualization, and abstraction as minimalism.

First, Strayer attempts to project an understanding of abstraction that emphasizes the attention to generalities instead of particularities for the convenience of representation, comparison or analysis. He writes, "Abstraction… a mode of representing objects which reduces the amount of particularity of the detail depicted," and concerns a work in which, as he also says, "neither the work itself nor any of its parts represents or symbolizes objects in the visible world" (Strayer 5).

The second clause of the aforesaid definition characterizes abstraction as the absence of a referential world. In that case, it is not possible, at least wholly, to suggest any degree of resemblance between the object in art and any object in the objective referential visible world. Thus, art creates its own referential universe with abstraction of the deictic 'outside' thereby challenging a bleak mimetic perspective. When issues like migration and homecoming make exclusive and uncritical reference to physical spaces bereft of their cultural propensities, the psychological complexities of spatiality are ignored. Such a view may be wholly oblivious of the empowering abilities of a strand of thought that wishes to steer clear of concrete visible geographies and willingly concede to the notion of space as one with no referent—a vacuum-like field of possibilities that await the preponderance of meaning. This inverts the colonialist understanding of space as an inert category that makes it possible to proliferate it with Orientalist fantasies. Here the vacuum-like possibility of space presents a different set of conceptual possibilities thereby negating others. In a way it subtly performs a 'mimicry' of the colonial position to destabilize its intended authoritative message (Bhabha 88). We will look at the character of such an empowerment relying on abstract space in Shire's poems on the 'home.' Even with respect to the question of representing time, there happens to be the deployment of abstraction. Collective resistance might sometimes present the possibility of using a unified and timeless past as the ideal of the future. Such a representation ignores the infinite strands of individual negotiations with the imagined past, appropriating or even erasing them in the trajectory of the metanarrative of collective mobilization. The selective use and management of archives and records even in the post-colonial space therefore remains contingent on such a narrative. Thus, even the past presents an array of possibilities for its reinvention. The non-visibility of the past as a concrete temporal event that its present inheritors have never empirically observed constitutes the possibility of its abstraction.

In the second case of abstraction understood as de-contextualization, one would have to look into ways in which the social and political precepts of migrant thought respond to the notion of individuation as outlined in the poetry of Shire. Rather than understanding the context as being defined by collectivist considerations, one shifts one's perception of it towards the perspective of the individual. In the case of Shire's poetry, in shifting the focus of one's lens of attention thus, one understands the specific relevance of decontextualization with respect to her perception of the past, space, and of home. The chasm that is created between modernism in a European context and its particular bearing on migrant thought as discussed earlier arises out of a de-contextualization of the thought from its European setting. While the European outlook on Modernism (as it emerges in the work of Berman and Bauman) acknowledges its radical dissident potential, such as its deployment in Shire's poetry on exile and migration, the latter looks upon it as a necessary survival trope and therefore renders it inevitable. The detachment of a philosophy from the context of its inception and its subsequent attachment to a different terrain constitutes abstraction in this case. This actually resembles a kind of abstraction that Strayer calls 'geometric abstraction' in artists like Paul Cezanne, wherein the artistic creation happens after the extraction of an idea from the objective world in a different spatial and temporal context (17-18).

The third category of abstraction in Strayer's definition is akin to minimalism which is to be traced in the ideas of Essentialism and Modernism:

> Thus, Essentialism differs from the Modernist notion that each medium has to explore its own nature and eliminate anything from its creative explorations that is shared by any other media. Essentialism does have

> in common with Modernism an interest in eliminating inessentials and working only with the possibilities allowed by what remains. (30)

The bare essentials of 'home' and space in Shire's poems can be associated not with well-defined physical spaces but with ideas—a move away from the material to the ideal domain in a curious reversal of the Marxist critique of Hegel, as Strayer elucidates: "Hegel thought that the reduction of three dimensions of space to two made painting more 'inward' and 'subjective' than sculpture, and the progress of subjectivity was continued in music and poetry" (21).

We will also explore how Essentialism's comparison between two objects or systems in order to reduce to bare essentials that which is common to both applies to Shire's interpretation of the worlds of the host and of 'home' in terms of their sameness. This frustrates hope as the concrete identification of a referent that could signal a difference between similar worlds (that is, a referent that could project itself as the relatively better world) is not possible. Subsequently, what will be evaluated is the presence of ideas as indication of possibilities and creative destruction as the antidote to the absence of a concrete referential space of fulfillment and satisfaction. These idealistic modes of creation, debunking, re-creation and resurrection serve as bulwarks against the threats of the home and the host.

Abstraction of Space in Shire's Poems About 'Home'

Warsan Shire is a Somali-British poet who was born to Somali parents in Kenya and presently resides in Los Angeles. She is well known for her poems on deportation, migration, exile and migrant identity in general. In fact, the lines from her poem "Home"—"no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark"—have become the "rallying call for refugees." However, while political solidarity involves concrete resolutions, it is often difficult to notice the abstract connotations of 'home' in Shire's poems that bespeak an individual's personal experience of empowerment not through concrete collective entitlements but through their effective dissolution.

The first couple of stanzas express a form of solidarity of situation between the first-person narrator and the troubled neighbors, whilst also self-reflexively presenting the excesses of collectivism in the lines "you only leave home/when home won't let you stay" (II. 10-11). The 'home' is an insistence on collective affinities and desires to foster a collective goal being enforced on the individual. The parameter for judging her sense of belonging to this collective 'home' is her willingness to compromise with individualism as and when it contradicts collectivist assumptions. Thus, the physical space of "home" in the first clause is relinquished when the idea of the "home" with its collectivist moorings compels conformity and does not provide room for compromise or individual negotiation. There is no external agency held culpable for exile but the 'home' itself as understood in its disturbances and politics—the representation of the habitus as the site of destruction because the abnormal, the impossible, the traumatic have become the norm ("habitus") within the home collective. However, the individual narrator also dissociates from this habitus without allowing her nurture within the collective to simply shape her actions as a passive agent. Thus, art enables a subtle and sufficient grappling with the habitus instead of simply outlining the subject's complicity, as sociological definitions of 'habitus' do. The latter, borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's explanation, define it as fixed values and norms that are "deposited in persons in the form of lasting disposition, or trained structures" (Wacquant qtd. in Navarro 16) as though the formative component of norms does not encounter any response from the conscious subject. Abstraction here emerges as a decontextualized notion of solidarity, with its collectivist indications ripped apart. The individual cannot afford to contemplate the political strategies of collective resistance when she witnesses the "neighbors running faster" than her. It is the desperate urge for self-preservation that determines her collectivist predisposition and not the reverse. She is attentive to the pace of movement of her neighbors (the

collective) as long as it is a signal to flee but must redirect her attention to the question of her own pace for survival as the neighbors will be of little help if she cannot sustain herself in the movement. The general implications of traumatic pain find equal reference in both individual accounts of trauma and discourses on collective suffering and solidarity. However, the special connotations that characterize the individual experience of it seem to be lost when collectivist discourses attempt to co-opt these within the contours of a metanarrative of pain. Shire shows us through the above-mentioned lines the need for decoupling (and hence, de-contextualizing) separate strands of conception of suffering. This is achieved by making a case for individual suffering singularly analyzed and considered. In other words, the lines simply account for a shift in focus from the collectivist preoccupation with the act of fleeing to individual urgency to run as fast as all others, failing which individual survival will be at stake and might only find a place in collective memory in annals of martyrdom or sacrifice. Chinua Achebe once wrote: "In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown how strongly this traumatic experience can possess their sensibility" (Achebe qtd. in Egudu 2).

Nevertheless, what emerges through the discourse of the individual in Shire is the triumph of individual necessity and preoccupations in the face of evictions which can only be conveniently co-opted by a simple collectivist perception defined by "their people" as in Achebe's words. The seriousness with which Shire demarcates the abstract ('home') can be understood relatively and by means of a comparison between "Home" and another poem entitled "The House." In "The House," the body opens itself up as a dense field of projections and possibilities which, no matter how boys exploit it, always seems limited to them since a holistic grasp of all of these projections is impossible for a finite masculine imagination. She writes: "Show us on the doll where you were touched, they said. / I said I don't look like a doll, I look like a house" (II. 1-2, vii).

Thus, her insistence on comparing her body to a 'house' projects it as a space replete with numerous possibilities shuttling between the known and the unexplored like the serpentine passages of a solitary house. However, the 'house' is to be distinguished from the 'home.' The metaphor of the 'house' is a provocation to test "their" competence in shifting perspectives and undertaking arduous pains. This complicates the encounter instead of simplifying it (by characterizing her body as a prop or 'doll'). The 'home,' on the other hand, as a signifier of unfulfilled yet numerous possibilities remains an instance of abstraction par excellence. However, the contrasting connotations of the 'home' and the 'house' are stark and the former emerges as an affective rather than a concrete category since "homing is a question of life-course rather than of chronological time" (Bocganni 69). The first-person narrator, with an experience of perpetual betrayal, regards the idea of detached adjustment as an essential ingredient of life. This is so because it helps strengthen one's ability to cope with an almost naturalized dynamism of rootlessness. Thus, the abstraction of 'house' occurs by its being transformed into the non-visible affective sign of the 'home.' While the experience of sensual pleasure, no matter how finitely imagined, is a mainstay of chronological time, the 'home' is a series of continuous adaptation (hence numerous possibilities) to bring about an affective reconciliation with ever-changing rootlessness. In "tearing your passport in airport toilet," the first-person narrator in "Home" wishes to strip the last vestige of her identity as belonging to a collective entity (the nation), but this does not lead to any preoccupation with a wholesome critique of the nation-state, nor does it lead to the wholesome embrace of the 'host.' Instead, the elements of her national identity are made contingently valuable/invaluable like the 'anthem' that she carries "forcefully under her breath." The 'anthem' as a mark of the past comes to be valuable and commiserative when the present circumstances in the land of the 'host' turn out to be a "prison" which is nonetheless "safer than the city of fire." Thus, even a critique of the nation-state does not assume any universal imperative since the very features of one's national identity might generate individual reconciliation for a migrant identity shuttling between horrors of the past and the present, and the homeland and the host land. The critique

emerges in this case through a de-contextualization of elements of national identity such as the 'anthem' to spark their contingent valuation. In fact, such an ability of abstraction is a tool of empowerment for her so much so that she invites the Other to reenact a similar degree of abstraction through the imaginary transformation of her horrid 'house'/'body' into a 'home', as she writes in "The House": "At parties I point to my body and say This is where / Love comes to die. Welcome, come in, make yourself at home" (x). This is a provocation for those unlike her to test them to think along imaginary registers after displaying the complexities of the 'house.' As it is, the complexities of the finite yet discreet entity of the house need to be grasped by a finite masculine imagination. In addition to it, the ability to deploy abstraction to conceive a non-concrete space of the 'home' is also posed as a challenge.

Change of material conditions or situation overtime could have a transformative impact upon migrants' consideration of 'homeliness.' As Paul Bocganni writes:

> The ultimate construction of one's place as more or less home-like or the continuum between a simple shelter, a provisional accommodation and a permanent dwelling is a time-sensitive relational process. The way of decorating and furnishing dwellings as an indicator of home-improvement aspirations is a promising field for investigating this empirically. (57)

In "Conversations about Home (At the Deportation Centre)," the line from "Home" is tweaked in order to replace the word, 'toilet' with 'hotel':

> I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. /
> I am bloated with language I can't afford to forget. (I, xiii-xix)

The place of the 'hotel' conveys the sense of being locked in transition. Marc Auge has argued that these are 'non-places' characterized by the fact that they do not perform the function of a geographical 'place' such as a site or a landscape in spite of sharing their situational character, and they also serve as receptacles for new conceptions of relations with places (78). In the context of Shire's poem, while the memory of the home is always evoked and reanimated through discomfort and unease in the place of the host (and hence it is not completely erased), the non-complete nature of the hotel posits a consciousness of ephemerality of pain/pleasure. Thus, it is in the hotel that a new relationship (which was not conceived prior to leaving home) with the land of the host is forged, namely, the shattering of the fantasy that the host would be a new 'home' as a place of complete fulfillment. On a quite contradictory note, this interpretation also challenges the function of 'non-place' (or 'passage' as Auge uses it). This is so because non-places reek of commercially fulfilling fantasies of relationships between travelers and destinations as in commercial advertisements in airports (Auge 86). However, here it also posits this 'passage' as a distance or space between a preconceived supposition regarding the host and the new necessity of negotiations arising after the dawning of realization of its fallacy. Interestingly, and as argued earlier in this article, it may also be pointed out that while Auge characterizes 'non-place' as a product of artistic Modernism, Shire's poem explores its raw survivalist (and not simply artistic) connotations that the trauma of eviction engenders. The 'non-place' in an eviction narrative is bereft of its commercial and Modernist leanings. The act of tearing the passport is suggestive of disgust at the nefarious politics at home that has wrought shame upon her identity. Performing this act in a hotel (a symbol of transient visibility and not hiding as in a 'toilet') might be indicative of the social unacceptable nature of her identity corroborated in her passport. The title of the poem with its emphasis on deportation connotes exile even in the space of the host where the hotel is an ironic space marked by its transitory connotation. However, it is also an ironic place because it fuels the narrator's maturity by convincing her of the necessity of finding new modes of negotiations between places which are essentially similar. Thus, while the hotel prima facie exposes the

hapless position of finding only a transitory room in the place of the host, its empowering abilities will only be discerned by a closer analysis of the poems' ability to vouch for creative negotiations. Thus, unlike Bocganni's sociological understanding, the subject in Shire's poem comprehends 'unhomeliness' instead of 'home improvement aspirations' by abstracting the bare essentials of situational condition in both these spaces. Nevertheless, abstraction also helps in the forging of contingent alliances with the particulars of each space (such as 'anthem') on the basis of the urgency caused by everyday encounters. Thus, there is a "language"—a symbolic register—that she "can't afford to forget" despite its burdensome appeal earlier in the place of the home. Their contingent value is reactivated subsequent to the understanding that there exists no singular referent as the ideal 'homeland.' Poetry, owing to its unique mode of representation, enables us to see how such a strategy of detachment is not only articulated but also played out in the poem.

The last stanza of "Home" shows 'home' entreating the resident to "run away from me since I do not know what I have become." This indicates the constant reframing of 'home' without any fixed identity, and also showcases three different meanings of 'home,' each significant in its place of utterance. The 'home' which is "the mouth of the shark" is indicative of the native place and occurs at a moment when the fleeing of neighbors justifies the speaker's movement. Again, the seeking of safe pastures defines 'home' as the host or indicates the aspiration to be at home in the land of the host. The third implication is radical and refers to the 'home' as 'becoming' (in a state of flux) and occurs at the point of unacceptability in either one's native place or in the land of the host. Thus, unlike a novel or anecdote, poetry, by means of its own contingencies, enables the creation of the 'home' in three ways—'home' as the non-visible, i.e., the absence of a singular referent; 'home' as de-contextualization indicating its myriad contexts of usage above; and, 'home' as the minimalistic projection of bare essence—the bare essence of unfulfillment in any space to which the migrant mind turns. However, the fact that no space actually accounts for consummate fulfillment makes individual negotiations possible even if it means keeping certain aspects in each space in suspended animation until they are expedient for sustaining the identity of the migrant mind. It is undoubted that this strategy might encounter its critique in certain deterministic interpretations such as the critique of the nation-state, due to the narrator's unwillingness to completely disregard aspects of national identity such as the 'anthem.' However, one realizes the value of such a mode of perception if one comprehends the role that the 'anthem' plays in sustaining the individual when her status as a migrant makes her foreign existence unbearable. In order to be attentive to such roles, one needs to carefully scrutinize individual concerns and strategies of adjustment. This clearly establishes the status of the literary as a system of subjective values and meanings. The de-contextualization of signifiers like the "nation," "anthem," etc. in purportedly objective disciplines ends up painting them in black and white.

Abstraction of Time in "Backwards"

Using the same parameters of judging abstraction of space as in Warsan Shire's 'home' poems, one can notice similar patterns of abstractions of time in her poetry. In order to illustrate this and its relevance to the migrant subject, one could engage with the poem "Bakwards," with generous intertextual references to the 'home' poems. The abstraction of time usually occurs as a challenge to the conception of an idyllic past characterized by remarkable differences from the present. The poem postulates the reversal of time but qualifies such a postulate with a possibility: "The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room."

While the issue of domestic power and control had been a real familial issue for the first-person narrator in the past, making "Dad appear" signifies a role-reversal of such relationships of control since the subject voluntarily re-conceives the past and re-invents paternal authority. The ability of dissolution of perceived realities and their re-emergence in poetry ("I can write the poem and make it disappear")

suggests full control over time as it can exist only through representations, while representation itself suggests full control over the past in the present. Thus, time is abstracted as possibilities of vision instead of as a single referent. The surge into the 'unknown' of time is possible only through its creative concoction (facets not visible in usual domestic relationships) and the poem becomes a tool in the Heideggerian sense, whose "reliability surpasses sheer serviceability in tending to a relationship with the Unknown" (Mitchell 10). Thus, time does not merely 'serve' by allowing the subject to determine her actions on the basis of time but also projects the possibility of reliving the past and recreating it in the present.

The poem also decontextualizes the past showing the reader how the past can be re-imagined within a mature present, even while being despicable, so as to create an entirely different meaning for itself. Thus, while the past refers to a time of physical immaturity ("smaller bodies," "breasts disappear"), it also signifies the possibility of sexual violence. Simply recalling it un-poetically would mean the evocation of a nightmarish trauma. On the other hand, its poetic remembrance sutures and re-members the disruptions of the past by controlling it. Thus, the creative ability dehumanizes the violent hands by imagining them to be dead stumps devoid of the agency characterizing human hands. This shows how unlike the past placed in the past, the past in the serviceable 'present' of poetry is in full control of the first-person narrator: "I can make us loved, just say the word. / Give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent, / I can write the poem and make it disappear" (II. 7-9). Thus, like the abstraction of past elements such as the 'anthem' in "Home," the abstraction of time past in "Backwards" serves as a tool of empowerment.

The plan for the future is resolved upon the future of identity as abstraction. Just as 'home' defines abstraction-par-excellence at the moment in which the other possible alternatives have been explored, "Backwards" signals abstraction as the only resolution for the future after the present contextualization of the past in poetry reveals its therapeutic value. The resolution is decisively modernist, in Berman's use of the term, since it is not predicated on the achievement of any concrete goal in the future, but is also premised upon a guarantee of abstraction as the only tool for future contemplation. This results in the means transforming into the end.

The recurrence of the first stanza in the reverse chronological order following the resolution for the future ("I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love") suggests that the poet-narrator has learnt to cope with the past instead of wishing it away. Thus, one must be able to 'see' the new in the apparently invisible exposition of the future, as Mitchell writes of Heidegger's excursus on the statue of goddess Athena: "To see the invisible (and to see it as invisible) requires an unusual light, which is to say that our relationship to the invisible is only possible through a medium of appearance" (60).

One cannot but note the sheer positivity in this context as re-creation requires the re-'appearance' of the past instead of its disappearance to avoid trauma. The occurrence of this renewed appearance is the aletheia that moulds subjectivity using abstraction as a vital tool. This enables the individual to deal effectively and affirmatively with that which is essentially her own—namely, the pain of the past.

Conclusions

Shire's poems have received global attention and were adapted by Beyoncé Knowles in her famous album Lemonade. The album is well-noted for its emphasis on the marginalization and repression of African-American identities in American society. However, the quintessential objective of the album is to showcase the Black claim to the American dream and project Beyoncé as the mark of success of such a claim-related struggle. In fact, the album is characterized by exemplary scenes showing images of various personalities involved with Black resistance (such as Rosa Parks looking out of the bus window) as well as renowned personalities of color such as Michael Jackson and Serena Williams. The embodiment of these

personalities makes Beyoncé the paradigmatic representative voice of the success of men and women of color (Hartmann 8). However, the fusing of all struggles into the voice of the individual performer bespeaks the performative enactment of individuality that voices the history of the collective. Needless to say, the analysis of Shire's poetry in this paper infers that the poems shirk away from any such collective representation by the individual narrator. Rather, they point to the specific instances of individuality that do not need collective reflections but can constitute a discourse on resistance in their own right. Secondly, resistance tantamount to material success which is the mainstay of the album does little justice to the immediate concerns of the migrant individual that is poignantly reflected in the poems. Thus, they embody the empowerment of the narrator through idealistic performance instead of material accomplishment. The necessity of constructive thought for the migrant individual rests on mental acclimatization and there happens to be much lost in translation in essentializing its objective with the material progress of the American Dream. However, one point that emerges through the adaptation of the poems in Lemonade which accentuates their essence is their accessibility and fluidity. This is because in spite of having different scopes and aims, the album (which, again, was a commercial success) found them expedient for use. Thus, the fluidity of interpretation characterized by abstractive elements such as de-contextualization, that marked the content and theme of the poems as illustrated in this paper, was validated by the adaptation.

It might be said therefore that the poetry of Warsan Shire advocates a position on resistance and dissidence that challenges a metanarrative of resistance which immediately associates it with collective solidarity. It also debunks the notion that trauma always needs collective association for its sublimation since such a view overlooks the co-option of individual negotiations with the same. Shire highlights the role of individual creativity in projecting an individualist therapeutic solution to trauma. In doing so, there also happens to emerge clear demarcating lines between the agency of poetry or art and the limits of purportedly objective streams such as anthropology or sociology, showcasing the unique semantic field of poetry.

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Amitav Ghosh and the 'Pizza-Effect': Re-discovering Shared Littoral Literature and Heritage

Abstract: This article focuses on two cartographically estranged places which continue to be historically concomitant—lower deltaic Bengal and Burma. The aim of the paper is to do a comparative 'pizza effect' study using contemporary Anglophone writings by Amitav Ghosh. Within the methodological perspective, the theoretical framework of the paper stems from the discussions of 'self-orientalisation'—a phenomenon in which a community's comprehension of native culture is determined by its acceptance in foreign lands. The paper argues how the writings of Amitav Ghosh have triggered a 'pizza effect' in two modes: on the one hand, they have led to the re-discovery of 'folklores' by a new generation of Anglophone readers for whom these were lost, on the other hand they have led to the re-finding of a shared history between Bengal and Burma. The first of these modes of 'pizza effect' is studied through the literary analysis of a folktale from the Sundarbans—*Bonbibīr Johurānamā*—and its representation and adaption in Amitav Ghosh's novel—*The Hungry Tide* (2004). The second case of 'pizza effect' is evaluated by comparing *Padmāvati*, a seventeen-century composition by Alaol, a Bengali poet in the Arakanese court and representations of Burma and Arakan in contemporary works of Amitav Ghosh—*The Glass Palace* (2000), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), and *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998).

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, Bengal, Burma, Folktales, Memory, Pizza-effect, Sundarbans.

Introduction

> *আমাদেরএইবাংলারপাশেইআরএকটিছিলডাকাতেরদেশ।সেদেশেরনামআরাকান।এইআরাকাননামেকোনো দেশএখনআরনেই,এখনসেটাবার্মারসঙ্গেমিশেগাছে।তখনচট্টগ্রামজেলারপাশেইছিলএইআরাকানরাজ্য,খান কারলোকেদেরবলাহতোমগ।লুটপাট,ডাকাতিওহিংশ্রতারজন্যএরাওছিলখুবকুখ্যাত।এখনোকোনোজায়গায় ন্যায়বিচারনাথাকলেলোকেবলে, 'মগেরমুল্লুকনাকি?'* (Gangopadhyay 16) (Bengali)
>
> [Next to Bengal was the famed land of the dacoits. Named Arkana. In contemporary times, any place by the same name ceases to exist, for it has now amalgamated with Burma. Back in those days, Arakan was next to Chittagong, the dwellers of the place were termed Maghs. They were notorious for looting, robbery and violence. If there is no justice and law in any land, people still question, 'Is it a magēramulluka?' (land of lawlessness)] (translation ours)

Niharranjan Ray holding witness to the interconnectedness of Bengal and Arakan in his Brahmanical Gods in Burma (1932) has postulated, "Arakan now in Burma is more a frontier province of Eastern India than a province of Burma" (83). While Chittagong was a major port in East Bengal, the only access to West Bengal was through the Sagar Island. The Hoogly River sanctioned a safe travel from Arakan to West Bengal. Arakan (now Rakhine State in Burma), isolated by the Arakan Yoma (Mountain Range) and solely accessible by the sea, with the Bay of Bengal to its west, the Indian subcontinent to its north, and Burma

to its east bears a coastal identity, similar to the Sundarbans[1] of India and Bangladesh. Around 1429, Min Saw Mon's successors to the Kingdom of Mrauk-U—the independent coastal kingdom of the Arakan—(1430-1785) aimed to end the hegemony of the Bengal Sultanate by dissolving Arakan's protectorate status under it. It was only in 1534 that the dream neared fruition when Zabuk Shah, also known as Min Bin—the ruler of Arakan (1531-1554), conquered Chittagong and propelled his kingdom to emerge as a "major power" (Seekins 95) with Portuguese mercenary aid. The Mughal invasions of Bengal from 1572 (J.F. Richards 33) onwards created opportune situations for the Maghs to plunder, rape, and escalate violence in the Sundarbans of Bengal. The constant terror of attacks and repeated killings and fear of enslavement drove away inhabitants from the Bengal coast. The extent of the impact of these raids is evident from Renell's Map of 1771, where all of the Sundarbans is shown as "depopulated by the Maghs" (J.M. Ghosh 6).

To curb the Magh invasion the Mughals had built several forts across the Bengal's riverine ecosystem like Shaista Khan's fort at the mouth of Rupnarayan River. The solidification of the Magh-Portuguese relations gave the Arakanese inhabitants an edge over slave trade and piracy. Kasim Khan, the Viceroy of Shah Jahan expedited the erasure of the Portuguese in the coast of Hoogly by revoking the *pharamāna* (a permit) by Akbar, on the basis of which the Portuguese had started a trading centre at Bandle. Shaista Khan, the Mughal governor of Bengal, and Pratapaditya, one of the Baro Bhuiyans ('bārōbhūm̐iẏānsa')[2], temporarily subjugated these pirates. But it is only after 1784, when Burma defeated Arakan, that the Maghs were brought under control. Later, they migrated in large numbers to Chittagong and to the island of Sandwip in Bangladesh.

The contemporary definition of a Magh in the Historical Dictionary of the Bengalis is that of, seafaring men from Arakan (roughly corresponding to the present Rakhine State of Myanmar, located to the southeast of Chittagong, Bangladesh) and usually associated with piracy. The Maghs were excellent sailors, and in the seventeenth century, they, along with the Portuguese pirates, were employed by the king of Arakan to raid the rich neighboring states of Bengal which they looted and ravaged. The expression 'magēramulluka' in Bengali, denotes complete lawlessness, and is derived from the memory of the terror they unleashed on the coastal areas of southeast Bengal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Chakrabarti and Chakrabarti 201).

Jamini Mohan Ghosh, writing about Magh raids in Bengal claimed that the scantily documented raids are the only manifested testimony to the geographic "intercourse" (J.M. Ghosh qtd. in Spearman 157) between Bengal (now divided between India and Bangladesh) and Arakan. Nothing can be further from the truth. For centuries the littoral landscape of the Sundarbans of Bengal and Arakan not only shared an "environmental continuum" (Charney 18) but also cultural, religious, and literary heritage.

The aim of the paper is to do a comparative 'pizza-effect' study using contemporary Anglophone writings by Amitav Ghosh. Coined by Agehananda Bharati in 1970, the phrase 'pizza-effect' elucidates a process of 'self-orientalisation' directly drawing from the history of pizza. Pizza, originally a hot-baked bread pie without slices in Italy, did not receive appreciation from the Italian masses until America promoted it in various varieties leading to the Italian staple's global acceptance as a delicacy after World War I (Bharati 273). Amitav Ghosh is considered one of the "most significant Indian writers" of the

[1] The Sundarbans is a vast deltaic archipelago situated in the Bay of Bengal constituting the southern end of both West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh; formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Meghna, and Brahmaputra rivers and their distributaries. For further details see: Annu Jalais—Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans, Routledge, 2011.

[2] In the Middle Ages and early modern period, Assam and Bengal had an alliance of soldier landowners known as the bārōbhūm̐iyāns. The alliance had independent entities each ruled by a chief or a landlord. Bārō translates into twelve but in praxis there were more than twelve chief or landlords.

twentieth century and has earned "considerable critical acclaim in the Indian subcontinent" (Mondal 163). It is perhaps paradoxical that Ghosh emerged as a central literary figure primarily through his concern with the margins. Even some of Ghosh's earliest writings were about marginal figures of history. Ghosh had decided to write about the popular yet somewhat forgotten episode of the Azad Hind Fauj[3] and its leader Subhas Chandra Bose for the June 1977 *The New Yorker* magazine special issue commemorating the fiftieth independence anniversary of India and Pakistan (Mondal 1). Amitav Ghosh had engaged with "self-consciousness" in his writings long before it acquired serious academic consideration by scholars when "critical theory," "postmodernism," and "postcolonialism" developed (Mondal 163). It is because of this engagement that Ghosh first received critical reception within academic circles, before achieving popular acclaim. In some ways his academic acclaim and award of literary prizes including the *Prix Medicis Entrangère* (Paris), the Sahitya Akamedi (Indian Academy of Literature), the Ananda *Puraskar* (Calcutta), the Arthur C. Clarke award, and the Commonwealth Writers Prize (which he declined) helped propel his popular reception within the Anglophone readers of India. Today there exist not only a number of unpublished PhD dissertations which engage with the themes touched by Ghosh but also full-length monographs (Mondal 164). This article therefore explores the impact of his writings on society and social consciousness of the people. The article focuses on two cartographically estranged places which continue to be historically concomitant—lower deltaic Bengal and Burma. It is argued here that the writings of Amitav Ghosh have triggered a 'pizza effect' in two modes. If on the one hand it has led to the re-discovery of 'folklores' by a new generation of Anglophone readers for whom these folklores were lost, on the other hand it has led to the re-finding of a shared history and culture between Bengal and Burma. The first of these modes of 'pizza effect' will be studied through the literary analysis of a folktale from the Sundarbans—*Bonbibī'r Johuranama* and its representation and adaption in Amitav Ghosh's novel—*The Hungry Tide*. The second case of 'pizza effect' will be evaluated by comparing *Padmavati*, a seventeenth century composition by Ālāol, a Bengali poet in the Arakanese court and representations of Burma and Arakan in contemporary works of Amitav Ghosh—*The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*. If Alāol brought a glimpse of the "Indic" world to Arakan in the seventeenth century, the forgotten consciousness of the political, literary, and cultural connections of Bengal with Arakan and Burma is recovered through a 'pizza effect' produced by the works of Amitav Ghosh. The theoretical framework of the paper shall stem from the discussions of 'self-orientalisation'—a phenomenon in which a community's comprehension of native culture is determined by its acceptance in foreign lands.

In the article "Islamic Terrorism and the 'Pizza Effect,'" Mark Sedgwick defines the process of the pizza effect in relation to two terms, 'localization' and 'globalization' (2007). In so doing, he simplifies 'globalization' as the fusion of separate regional systems into one single global system in the economic, political, social as well as intellectual and cultural sphere. For example, he underlines the importance of Istanbul and Cairo compared to the irrelevancy of New York, Paris, and London in the Middle Eastern regional system. However, with the advent of globalization, i.e., fusion, Sedgwick says, Paris, London, New York, and Washington emerged as the new global centers forcing Istanbul and Cairo into the backdrop. Sedgwick argues, though there was cultural traffic in both directions, Paris and New York exercised significant intellectual influence on Middle East. As the corollary of globalization, he identifies 'localization' as the consumption component of the globalized production element (Sedgwick 3). For example,

[3] The Azad Hind Fauj was the military wing of the Azad Hind Government (Provisional Government of Free India) established in 1942 during the Second World War in Southeast Asia from among the British Indian Prisoners of War and members of the diaspora to resist British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. For further details see: Peter Ward Fay—The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1942-1945. University of Michigan Press 1993.

Microsoft as a global product builds local acceptance by providing Arabic language support in their Middle East product versions. Similarly, for the purposes of this paper, the *Bonbibīr Johurānāmā* has always been largely a 'rural' and 'provincial' folktale restricted to the Sundarbans. Amitav Ghosh's rendering of the tale through a global language—English—has led to its greater recognition in urban Bengal, particularly in Calcutta. Sedgwick uses one more term: "spontaneous localization," (4) where Americans read the translated version of Rumi's[4] poetry and develop a different and unmethodical comprehension of it, thereby making the newer ideas of Rumi's poetry more acceptable to the native readers of Rumi. To this process he couples the phenomenon of the 'pizza-effect': "International transfer in a globalized world is often a recursive process, as is recognized by the term 'pizza effect'" (4). Through his writings, Amitav Ghosh too has produced a 'mythic' relation between Arakan/Burma and Bengal. As a writer of historical fiction, the Burma he reproduces is one tinted by the colonial gaze. Amitav Ghosh does it deliberately to create a 'period effect'[5] but it often leaves a distorted image of Burma as a timeless land in the minds of his readers—both in Bengal and Burma. Bharati, in "The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns"—the paper where he coined the term "Pizza-Effect" (274)—is primarily aimed at an anthropological and linguistic analysis of the modern Hindu religious 'gurus' and their followers. These 'swamis' are known to attract the majority of the English-speaking urban Indians through their instrument of disseminating religious knowledge by the usage of Victorian English. Hence, they are successful in creating a novel grassroots idiom that is more acceptable to the audience than that of the plain preaching in local language. Thereby, the salient feature of Bharati's "pizza-effect" (274) is to be able to make the indigenous product acceptable to the natives only after it has been embraced in foreign lands and has been presented back to the autochthon with foreign features assigned to it. In "Zen and the Art of Inverting Orientalism: Religious Studies and Genealogical Networks," Jorn Borup talks on similar lines of theology and religion and illustrates how orientalism is re-represented to the 'Orients.' The idea of the 'pizza-effect' theorized by all is in response to theological and religious undertakings within the gamut of postcolonial understandings. In our estimation, the consequence of the 'pizza-effect' in the literary realm is insufficiently addressed. The aim of the paper is to respond to this call of the existent aperture. The theoretical framework of the 'pizza-effect' will be deployed in this paper to describe how local residents of lower deltaic Bengal and Burma, who previously dissed their native cultures, now take pride in accepting and propagating them after having received literary inclusion of their folktales worldwide through the ink and pen of Amitav Ghosh writing in English. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that the term "native," derived from post-classical Latin nātīvus, means "a person born in a specified place, region, or country, whether subsequently resident there or not." Therefore, for the purposes of this article, the term "native" denotes a person born in Bengal and Burma, but very much part of the Anglophone world, just as Amitav Ghosh himself. Thus, the "contemporary production and consumption (of literature) no longer takes place within discrete national borders but unfolds in a complex system of transnational economic and cultural exchanges characterized by the global flow of cultural products and commodities" (Jay 34). The cultural dominance of English particularly in the Indian and Burmese context, because of the colonial past and the present neoliberal global order, means "multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers" (Sumy 79). Thus, Ghosh enjoys a very wide Anglophone readership in Bengal and Burma. Moreover, "his novels, essays, and short stories have been translated into some twenty languages" (S. Richards 256). The Hungry Tide itself has been translated into Bengali by Achintyarup Roy.

[4] Jalaluddin Rumi–Persian poet (1207-1273)

[5] The term refers to re-creation of a historical period in fictional literature, particularly in the genre of historical fiction. In this case the period under discussion is colonial Burma in the nineteenth century.

The Beautiful Forest: Bonbibī's[6] Sundarban

> How do you lose a word? Does it vanish into your memory, like an old toy in the cupboard, and lie hidden in the cobwebs and dust, waiting to be cleaned out or rediscovered? (Ghosh A, *Hungry Tide* 204)

Amitav Ghosh in *Hungry Tide* plays with the idea of memory and association. In the quoted lines, he expresses his anguish over how things are lost and if lost, how they can be rediscovered. Such is the relation between local folktales, memory and acceptance. Also, embedded in the thought process is the association between different geographical spaces. For the purpose of the paper the connections shared between Sundarbans and Burma, as represented in the story, will be traced. The connection when proven will reflect the kind of joy that Nirmal—whose diary drives the narration of the story—finds in Rilke's "Happiness":

> We, who have always
> Thought of joy
> As rising…feel the
> Emotion
> That almost amazes us
> When a happy thing
> Falls. (24)

Nirmal wrote the personal notebook hoping that one day his cousin Kanai would read it to rejuvenate in the present memory the past that Nirmal has lived. It is an attempt at recreation of lived experiences though recorded words. Nirmal's extensive use of Rilke's poetry sets the ground for our investigation. Two authors sharing a dialogue erase the historic sense of space and situate everything in the present and allow the generation of a cross-fertilized intertext. Most often when Nirmal refers to Rilke as "the poet," the boundaries of recognition vanish for the reader. Following the concepts of antonomasia—replacing the proper name with an epithet—, "the poet" to Nirmal is Rilke but to the reader, if of Bengali origin, is Rabindranath Tagore. Such is the case with every reader: they associate "the poet" with the one they have always known of as "the poet" within their community, culture and society. This again reverberates the notions of memory and erasure. Whatever is easily memorable or associable to us we relate it to the epithets. Every time the "signified" changes even though the "signifier" remains the same. The search for the diary brings Kanai to Sundarbans where he meets Piya and again the strings of memory and forgetfulness are played. Piya—a biologist specializing in marine animals—, though a Bengali by origin, has completely forgotten the Bengali language while being raised in the United States of America. Or maybe, she never learnt the language or was comfortably happy in not associating with it. Her decision to accept her native language or not is interlinked with her relationship with her Bengali parents. She has had a sad childhood and her parents fought a lot in Bengal. It was hard for her to escape the language, but she thought it best to not learn the meaning of the words. By so doing, she saved herself from some trauma. Such is the story between Sundarbans and Burma. It is strewn with the blood bathed history of slave trade and loot, of the barbarity of the Maghs on Bengal's natives; that went unaccounted for in every history textbook. Thus, the geographical ties between Sundarbans and Burma were best forgotten. However,

[6] Bengali Bonbibī is translatable into English as the mistress of the forest.

proofs of the link survived. The songs of the Bengal boatmen, mostly those that were compiled for Maẏamanasinhaḥ-Gītikāis[7] are replete with the stories of the river dacoits:

বোনেতেলুকাইয়াযতডাকাতগণ।
পথিকধরিয়ামারেধোনেরকারণ।।
টাকাপয়সারাখেলোকেমাটিতেপুতিয়া।
ডাকাতিকরিয়ালয়গামছামুড়িদিয়া।।
ডাকতেদেশেররাজাবাদশাহনামানে।
উজাড়রইলোরাজ্যকাজীরশাসনে।। (Sen 196)

(In the forest hide all the dacoits,
And attack street strollers for money.
People keep their money buried under the land,
They loot by tying a piece of cloth around the human neck.
The dacoits are fearless, they do not fear the decree of the land by the Badshah),[8]
Even under the Muslim rule the land remains vulnerable to the attack by the dacoits.)
(Translation ours)

Piya visits Sundarbans in search of dolphins. She had previously studied dolphins I Cambodia along the Mekong, from Phnom Penh to the Laos border. She had discovered her research interest through a lesser-known history that involved Bengal. To her surprise she had learnt that the first Orcella was discovered in Calcutta. Worried by the stories of the visit of "a school of giant sea creatures" (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 475) in a lake near Calcutta, which is Salt Lake City (a large suburban postcolonial residential township) now, the superintendent of the Botanical Gardens—Edward Blyth—, visited the place. The creatures had landed there owing to a sudden rise in water levels of the Bengal delta, the consequent wave of which travelled into the hinterland flooding the swamps and wetlands surrounding Calcutta. Previously, he had heard reports from the Malabar Coast where the locals had attacked an eighty-eight feet length dolphin. By the time Blyth had reached the site, the water had receded to the original level with the dolphins panting for breath with their white bellies exposed. Blyth found them to be a species different than the short-finned pilot whales. However, the locals had tried their best to save the dolphins. They had tried to tow the animals through a channel into the river. Many had been saved the night before. And the remaining were only a few from among twelve schools of dolphins that had visited. Blyth had two of the

[7] Candra KumāraDē and Dīnēśa Candra Dē collected the folk ballads from the region of Mymensingh, Bangladesh and published the compilation under the name Maẏamanasinhaḥ-Gītikā at University of Calcutta Press.

[8] Aurangzeb (*Ā'ōraṅjēba*) was on the throne (1658-1707) while the lands in Bengal under his rule reeled with lawlessness. Nonetheless, Bengal was the richest amongst all the other regions under the then Mughal rule owing to its huge food grain production. Though the Mughals were able to intercept attacks through the hills, they were completely incapable of fighting attacks in the water. Compared to the English, French, Spaniard and the Portuguese, the Mughals were inefficiently trained in tackling attacks through water ways. Their big ships consumed much time to make a small movement as compared to the slim water vessels of the others. History chronicles Aurangzeb to be a brutal ruler. He imprisoned his father and intimidated his three brothers to death for Delhi's throne. To escape death at the hands of Aurangzeb, his brother Shah Shuja fled to Bengal from where he went to Arakan. Aurangzeb was infuriated that in place of handing over his brother to him, the Maghs of Arakan stole his brother's treasury and killed him alongside his family on site. After this incident, Aurangzeb took special interest in curbing the expansion of the Maghs. Until then he had been oblivious of the presence and importance of Bengal. Now Bengal caught his attention owing to its history of being frequented by the Maghs. Aurangzeb wanted revenge.

unknown species reserved for him. In due time he had reduced the two dolphins to "perfect skeletons" (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 478) for his "prolonged examination of the bones" (478). On evaluation he named the species as Globicephalus indicus meaning the Indian pilot whale. After 25 years, one of the skeletons made its way to the British Museum. It was here that newer studies revealed it to be the relative of the killer whale and named it the Orcaella Brevirostris. Later it came to be known as the Irrawaddy dolphins. This species is euryhaline in nature—having capability to adapt to a wide range of salinities. They live in the rivers and estuaries of the Bay of Bengal and the Southeast Asia. The fact that they migrate between the Bay of Bengal and the Southeast Asian waters twice every year demonstrates the presence of the shared ecological networks of communication between Bengal and Southeast Asia through waterways. Surprisingly, Piya refrains from calling the dolphins as Irrawaddy dolphins, except for the first encounter. For the rest of the book, she refers to the dolphins by their Latin name, the Orcaella. She does so on having discovered a unique migratory pattern in the dolphins of the Sundarbans. Unlike the Irrawaddy dolphins, Piya noticed that those of the Sundarbans were a distant relative of the Mekong dolphins and migrated twice every day and not twice every year:

> Was it possible that these Sundarbans Orcaellas did twice each day what their Mekong cousins did once every year? Had they found a novel way of adapting their behavior to this tidal ecology? Could it be that they had compressed the annual seasonal rhythms of their Mekong relatives to fit them into the daily cycle of tides? (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 270)

The Hungry Tide is centered around two major themes: the idea of the revolution—the relation between the Marichjhāpi massacre and the Rohingya refugee crisis[9]—and the re-analysis of the local folktales of Ganga and the Bonbibī (mistress of the forest). Like any other refugee crisis narraIve, state generated violence resulIng in denied ciI=enship to a speci`c group is at the heart of Marichjhāpi and the Rohingya crisis. The connections are not just incidental but historical. The partition of Burma from India in 1937 and the partition of Bengal itself into East Pakistan and West Bengal in 1947 lie at the roots of both these tragedies. In 1979, following the Liberation War of Bangladesh, a humongous number of East-Pakistan refugees sought shelter in the Sundarbans Marichjhāpi islands. They came to Sundarbans from the camps in central India. They were under the belief that the Left government in Bengal will support the relocation. However, it was not the case and by citing illegal deforestation for human settlement to be an offence under the Forest Act, the Bengal government forcefully evicted them. The refugees were killed, their makeshift boats submerged, and their half dead bodies fed to the tigers in the nearby reserve. This is the story that Nirmal was meaning to tell Kanai. The massacre in which Kusum[10] died. It was through Kusum that Kanai learnt about Bonbibī for the first time—while Piya was introduced to the forest deity by Fokir,[11] Kusum's son:

> *আল্লাহআল্লাহবোলোসবাইইয়ে এক মন।*
> *বনবিবিরকথাএবারশোনোসর্বজন।।*
> *বনবিবিশাহজঙ্গলিভাইবোনেতো।*
> *যেরূপেহলেনপয়দাবোনেরবিছেতে।।*
> *যেরূপেমক্কাহইতেগমনকরিল।*

[9] Rohingya people are of Muslim (and some Hindu) origin and have lived in Arakan/Rakhine state for centuries, but are dubbed by the Burmese state as 'illegal Bengalis' brought by the British in the colonial period. Currently they face genocide and displacement.

[10] A female character in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide, who was Kanai's childhood friend from the Sundarbans.

[11] Fisherman

বাদাবনেমাটিরমধ্যেপৌঁছিলেনআসিয়া॥(Khater, BanabibiJahuranama 1)

(And came to reside in the land of the eighteen ebb tides
Let us all pray in the name of Allah
Let us all listen to the story of *Bonbibī*
The brother and sister duo
Their birth story amidst the forest
How they traveled from Mecca
And came to reside in the land of the eighteen ebb tides)[12]

"You mean you don't know the story of Bonbibī?" (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 220) Kusum was awe struck at Kanai's lack of knowledge. Agitatedly, she looked for a valid answer from Kanai, "Then whom do you call on when you are afraid?" (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 220). Here Amitav Ghosh artfully creates the 'pizza effect' not just for his readers but also within the novel—Kanai, a representative of urban Bengal, rediscovers his roots as he encounters the other side of the rural-urban, modern-primitive, global-local divide which exists strikingly even within a relatively compact geographic space. *Bonbibī'r Johuranama* (*The Miracles of Bonbibi*) is a tale around Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli, her brother. Born in Mecca, they were sent to Sundarbans to help people get rid of the tiger Dakshiṇa Rāyā.[13] After a long battle for power, Bonbibi established her reign and divided the land of the ebb and tide between the humans and the beasts. She decreed that those who would seek to garner more than what is required from the forest would face her wrath in the form of a tiger attack. *Johuranama* following the Bengali literary tradition written in the format of dwipodipoya (dvipadīpayār)[14] is a book on the life history of the deity. The version that is in use now and has synced with the *Bonbibī'r* cycle, has attracted annual editorial interventions that allow modernization of the spelling and paratextualities attributed to the author (Stewart 123). The book opens to the right like those written in Arabic. Some words are Urdu, but it has a Hindu ritualistic ring to the ear when recited. Kusum has had her life revolving around *Bonbibī'r*. She is a stereotypical Sundarban dweller. Their consciousness and fear psychology are attached to the stories of Bonbibi. Though these folklores were well known among the literary elite of Calcutta, the consumption of these tales by a global audience through the writings of Amitav Ghosh led to a revival of interest among the urban natives. This can be ascertained through the letters and reviews written by such native Anglophone readers. It is fortunate that Amitav Ghosh has shared such letters which he has received over the years on his official website. For instance, Satyajit Dutta, one such reader, mentions in his letter "that many years back, I happened to read a book named Banglar Puranari, a compilation of (now) lost epics by Dsinesh Chandra Sen[15] … Reading about Bon Bibi … in your books took me back to those days of wonder. As an aside, I hope Bon Bibi remains Bon Bibi, I heard reports that Bibi is morphing into Debifaster than we can imagine" (Dutta).

[12] Translation by Amrita DasGupta.

[13] In Bengal, Dakshiṇa Rāyā was the first God who was conceived to be the presiding deity of the tigers. He was known to rule the south (Dakshiṇa) of Bengal. Among the varied opinions, a sparse section of the islanders of the Sundarbans believe Dakshiṇa Rāyā to be the General of Mukut Rai, the King of Brahmannagar in Jessore. He was conferred with the title 'Bhatiswar' (the ruler of the southern districts) as he was known to rule over lower Bengal. The title has survived until today and has acquired a status of divinity within the Dakshiṇa Rāyā cult. In Bengal's folk culture, Dakshiṇa Rāyā is presented as a soldier, befitting his identity as the Princely General. However, most of Sundarbans islanders believe in the myths of Bonbibir Johuranama and consider Dakshiṇa Rāyā to be a shape shifting sage who could metamorphose into a tiger. For further details see: L.S.S O'Malley—Bengal District Gazetteer. Calcutta Press, 1908.

[14] Formed of rhymed couplets, each line has twelve syllables with a break or caesura towards the middle.

[15] Bengali writer, educationist and researcher of folklore (1866-1939)

Kusum, in *The Hungry Tide*, like any other islanders, believes in the wonders and benevolence of the deity. Kusum lives her life drawing parallels from the mythology of the Bonbibī deity. Bonbibī is known to save Dukhey—a little boy who had accompanied his uncles Dhona and Mona to Sundarbans. In return of boatloads of wax and honey, Dhona and Mona left Dukhey in the forest as a sacrifice for Dakshiṇa Rāyā, the shape shifting tiger. Dakshiṇa Rāyā is known to protect his forest resources fiercely. Initially, he would only allow the sharing of these resources in return for human sacrifice.

> *যাবৎনাদেবেমোরনাড়াবালিপূজা।*
> *নাহিদিবামম মধুদেখিবামজা।।*
> *যদিতুমিনাড়াবালিপূজাপারোদিতে।*
> *সাতডিঙামমদেবতোমারডালিতে।।* (Khater, *BanabibiJahuranama* 1) (Bengali version)
>
> (So long as human sacrifice is not offered to me
> I will not give you wax or honey; I will have fun
> If you are successful in offering me a human sacrifice
> I will give you seven boatloads of wax)[16]

Dukhey following his mother's guidance calls for Bonbibī's mercy and Bonbibī appears to save him from the tiger. Subsequently, a fight ensues between Bonbibī and Dakshiṇa Rāyā. The battle ends with the defeat of Dakshiṇa Rāyā and Bonbibī decrees that the lands of the Sundarbans be equally divided amongst the humans and the animals. Likewise, Kusum remembers the time when her father was saved from a tiger attack at Garjontola (Garjanatalī). To show his reverence he had installed a shrine of the Bonbibī there and paid respect to her annually. Kusum followed on her father's footstep and went there on her return to Sundarbans with her son Fokir. This time she took Nirmal with her and told him that the dolphins were the deity's divine messengers (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 489). But Bonbibī did not respond to her prayers when she sought protection for her father from the hungry tigers. However, Bonbibī had been benevolent and listened to Kusum's prayers while she fanatically searched for her widowed mother in Dhanbad. Her entire life, like any other islander's, was dependent on the mercy of the Bonbibī. It is surprising that until the publication of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* the folk culture of the Sundarbans had remained out of the consciousness of the urban inhabitants of Calcutta, although the city of Calcutta is situated only at 109 kilometers from the Sundarbans. It forced the Calcutta residents to recognize and appreciate the sub-cultures. At a point in time Sundarbans extended until the present-day Salt Lake, West Bengal (India) (A. Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 452). The population boom in West Bengal etched way for urbanization and the Sundarbans were gradually forced back to remain contained within the margins of the Hooghly River in West Bengal, India and Baleswar River in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, the retreat of Sundarbans to the present geo-location could not erase the continued presence of temples of the inferior gods and goddesses of the land of ebb and tides—in the outskirts of Kolkata. Bonbibi, Ola Bibi,[17] and Dakshiṇa Rāyā temples are scattered across Garia, Baruipur and Sonarpur. There is an Olabibitala Lane in Howrah—a twin city of Kolkata opposite to the Hooghly River. A news report of the Times of India titled "Tiger god finds followers in urban jungle" underlines Calcutta's reaction to the subculture:

[16] Translation by Amrita DasGupta

[17] Ola Bibī is the presiding deity of the third major epidemic in India, the Cholera. She is usually depicted as a female deity wearing a gown and riding a horse. For further details see: Mukhlesur Rahman—*The Early History of the Cult of The Mother Goddess in Northern Indian Hinduism with Special Reference to Iconography*. PhD Dissertation, London University, 1965.

> About 150 kms away, a family in Kolkata too has been appeasing the lord of the jungle for more than half a century. Every religious event of the Banerjee house of Bhawanipore begins with a full-fledged puja[18] of Dakshin Ray. They even have a small temple dedicated to the tiger god, complete with a specially crafted stone idol… My grandmother, Saralabala Devi, dreamt of an image that was similar to Dakshin Ray's. She was not sure which god she had seen, or where it was worshipped. After consulting a few elders, she started travelling southward from Bhowanipore, searching for a temple that worshipped Dakshin Ray. Eventually, she reached Dhopdhopi, the place which has a temple dedicated to the tiger God. There, she was convinced that she had indeed seen Dakhshin Ray in her dream…The family members even travel to Dhopdhopi around five times a year. Every puja at the household begins with a prayer to the god. Pictures of Dakshin Ray are carried by members on auspicious occasions. (Mitra)

What should interest us, is the inclusion of these inferior deities into the major Hindu pantheon. Most of these female deities like Ola Bibi have been associated to Siva as his consort under the name of Cāndi. Thus, the change of name from Ola Bibī to Olai Cāndi is a result of growing Brahmanical Hinduism in the Bengal region. The original names of these cult goddesses hint at their non-Brahmanical origin but words like Kali or Cāndi being suffixed to their name document the adaptation of cult goddesses into the pantheon of orthodox Hinduism by creating a semblance of having a Puranic origin (Rahman 189-193). Hence, Calcutta's reaction to the subculture operates in three ways: absolute negation, inclusive adaptation through keeping faith in these deities in their original form, and conditioned acceptance via believing in village deities having a Puranic origin. Nonetheless, the subcultures continue to thrive—however little—alongside the faith in major pantheons within Kolkata.

The Indo-Bengal in Burma

> The noise was unfamiliar and unsettling, a distant booming followed by low, stuttering growls. At times it was like the snapping of dry twigs, sudden and unexpected. And then abruptly, it would change to deep rumble, shaking the food-stall and rattling its steaming pot of soup… It was cold, the start of central Burma's brief but chilly winter… When the first booms reached the stall there was a silence, followed by a flurry of questions… What is it? Ba le? What can it be? And then Rajkumar's sharp, excited voice cut through the buzz of speculation. "English cannon," he said in his fluent but heavily accented Burmese… Frowns appeared on some customer's faces as they noted that it was the serving-boy who had spoken and that he was a kalaa —an Indian, with teeth as white as his eyes and skin the color of polished hardwood. (A. Ghosh, *Glass Palace* 7-8)

These are the dramatic opening lines of Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace* which traces the historic connection between India and Burma—a connection marked by violence and destruction of the Burmese Kingdom. *The Glass Palace* is particularly well placed to mark this conflictual relationship as it traces the exile of the last King of Burma—King Thibaw Min of the Konbaung Dynasty—to India's western extremity in Ratnagiri then in the Bombay Presidency after the conclusion of the final Anglo-Burmese War of 1885. It is perhaps no coincidence that the British had exiled Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor to Rangoon in lower Burma after the failed 1857 Revolt in India.

The Indian in the eyes of the Burmese (mostly the Bengali because of its proximity with Burma) was the imperialist collaborator—the kālā. "The Burmese saw the kala as a race, a lu-myoor 'type of person.' Indians, Arabs, and Persians, then Portuguese, Armenians, and Dutch, all arrived to trade or offer their services as mercenaries. All appeared similar to the Burmese eyes: bearded men (and they were almost all men) from the west" (Myint-U 11). In the Burmese imagination Rajkumar was the quintessential kālā,

[18] Hindu ritual of worship.

a product of British imperial immigration policy. How true was this constructed imagination? Is it that the British, as they invaded Arakan and then mainland Burma, brought in their quake the kālā? The inter-connectedness of Arakan (thereby Burma, as Arakan, had become part of the Burmese Empire in 1784) and Bengal has a much longer history. The story of this entanglement dates back to the seventeenth century if not earlier. This connection is best embodied through the personage and works of Ālāol, the court poet of the Kingdom of Mrauk-U. He is best remembered for his rendition of the Padmāvātī. The original Padmāvāti was written by Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī around 1540 in Hindavi or Avadhi. Jāyasī "was practicing Sufi of both the Chishti and Mahdavi lineages" (Metcalf 65). This is an epic story of a love triangle involving the fictitious Singhali (Sri Lankan) Princess Padmāvātī and real historic characters like Ratnasen, the ruler of Mewar, with Chittorgarh as its capital and Alauddin Khalji, the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate—the pre-eminent power in South Asia between 1206 and 1526 (Asher and Talbot 106). Ālāol composed his rendition in an epic poetry style inspired by Jāyasī in 1651 under the patronage of the Arakanese court (D' Hubert 137). Ālāol brought the 'Indic' and the 'Afghan' world to Arakan long before the British ever set foot in Burma. What was essentially an intercourse of trade, literature, and culture was disrupted and converted to an interaction based on dominance by the British. Thibaut D'Hubert in his analysis of the Ālāol Padmāvātī shows that the text was not only composed in Middle Bengali but also had various glimmers from 'Indic' traditions. For instances when Ratnasen, in his love for Padmāvātī tries to commit suicide, the Gods invoke Mahādeva (i.e., Śiva), one of the Hindu Trinity. They cry out:

> āẏa prabhu mahādevamr̥tyuñjaẏa- kāẏā |
> yadyapipāṣāṇaāmihaïtomāchāẏā || (Ālāol 43)
>
> (Alas Lord! Śiva whose body overcame death!
> Even though we are made of stone, we are your shadow!)[19]

The 'Bengali' or the 'Indic' influenced even the style of literary production in Arakan in the seventeenth century. For instance, Ālāol inserted gītas (rhyme) in his epic poetry in a variety of meters thus "using the textual, musical, and dramatic dimensions of the form of saṅgīta that was the Bengali pacālī (a form of folk poetry)" (D' Hubert 137). Even though these were court productions, the epic poems of Ālāol had a wide audience in Arakan as they were recited orally. The intercourse between Bengal and Burma was multi-layered. The advent of colonialism strengthened this intercourse even if it did alter the relationship and nature of the connections. Many Bengalis found lucrative business options and employment in Burma under the patronage of the British. This rendered them 'collaborators' or 'oppressors' in the eyes of the Burmese. Amitav Ghosh gives a glimpse of this conflictual relationship in his non-fiction *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*:

> I had heard about the temple as a child, from an aunt who married into a wealthy Bengali family that had settled in Burma… My aunt's husband ran a prosperous timber business. He was nicknamed the Prince because of his extravagant tastes… 'It was a golden land,' he would say. 'The richest country in Asia except for Japan'…In college, I discovered that the picture was not quite so simple…I argued with the Prince. 'But Indians were bitterly resented in Burma, weren't they?' (66-67)

These old connections are slowly fading away. Are new connections not possible? Amitav Ghosh mentions his own 'new connection' with Burma when he met Suu Kyi in 1980 at Oxford as a graduate student. Aung San Suu Kyi, the beacon of Burma's democracy, went to "school and college in Delhi before going to

[19] Translated by Thibaut D' Hubert 302

Oxford" (A. Ghosh, *Dancing* 75). Through the rest of the pages of the book Ghosh endeavors to bring forth the possibilities of 'new connections' free from colonial era prejudices. Ghosh's work in many ways deliberately tries to create 'a pizza effect' in terms of reviving the intercourse between Bengal (India) and Burma. He is also attentive to the nuances of the possibility of revival of Indo-Burmese connections. Long before the Rohingya crisis captured headlines in western media as the 'boat people' in 2015, Ghosh had a Rohingya character in his *Sea of Poppies*—Serang Ali, the head of lascar crew in the slave ship The Ibis. Serang Ali reveals his Rohingya identity when he strikes up friendship with Ben Zachary, an American with part-Black heritage who camouflages his true identity to take command of the *Ibis*.

> Although startled at first, Zachary soon found himself speaking to the serang[20] with an unaccustomed ease: it was as if his oddly patterned speech had unloosed his own tongue. 'Serang Ali, where you from?' he asked. 'Serang Ali blongi Rohingya-from Arakan-side.' (A. Ghosh, *Sea* 49)

It is perhaps apt that Serang Ali not only becomes confidant and protector of Zachary's terrible secret, but at the end of the novel helps Neel Rattan Halder, the dispossessed Zamindar[21] of Raskhali to escape the terrible fate of convict labor in Mauritius. Ghosh beautifully intertwines the historic skill of the Rohingya and the Arakanese in navigation with natural empathy shared between three characters oppressed and victimized by the colonial racialized regimes. Serang Ali at the helm of the rudder of a longboat helps Neel and other convicts escape from the slave ship *Ibis*.

> In that unearthly light a longboat seemed to leap out at Zachary, from the crest of a wave: although it was already some twenty yards off the schooner's beam, the faces of all five men who were in it could be seen. Serang Ali was at the rudder, and the other four were huddled in its middle—Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua. (A. Ghosh, *Sea* 806)

It is through Amitav Ghosh's writings that there is a renewed interest in Bengal/Indo-Burmese connections. This too can be ascertained through the letters and reviews by ordinary as well as prominent Anglophone natives of Bengal and Burma. One such letter which best captures this essence from the Burmese audience is by U Kyaw Thein Lwin, a former naval officer. U Kyaw Thein Lwin's father, U Ba Lwin was a distinguished educationist, freedom fighter, and founder of Myoma National School in the 1920s. Thein Lwin writes:

> [The Glass Palace] is not all fiction, and perhaps I'm the only living person in Myanmar who is actually connected with some of the characters and plots in the Book. For example, the ship he hired to bring coolies from East India, named the DUFFERIN was converted as a training ship in Bombay in 1927 and I spent three long years on it, from 1941-43. I also remember a Mr. Dinanath, who was a Rotarian and a close friend of my father and we often visited their residence before Japanese invasion. The other family—Arjan Singh's connected with the story, were also prominent teak exporters and Boat builders who lived in Moulmein and were friendly with my in-laws. Of course, I could vividly follow his stories about pre-war Rangoon commercial life, Pegu Club etc. and the part played by Subhas Chandra Bose, whom my Dad knew during the war and the exploits of the I.N.A. Lastly, D.A Ahuja and T.N. Ahuja were the two leading photographers dealing with studio photography during pre-war years as mentioned…(Lwin)

[20] The term has its etymological origin in the Persian word sarhang (commander). It denotes a native boatswain or captain of a Lascar crew. For further details see: *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2000

[21] The landlords of Bengal were called Zamindars and the British colonial government tried to dispossess them and take control of their estates from time to time.

The critical audience response from Bengal which displays this renewed interest in Indo-Burmese because of Ghosh's writings can be gauged again from such letters. Karan, a young reader, writes in his letter "I just finished reading *The Glass Palace*. It was an amazing read. I had no idea about Burma; that it was an egalitarian society, that it was a rich country, that it had no caste system and many other things… I've been bit pissed with India and your book seemed to generate interest in subcontinent's history" (Karan). This is perhaps only one of those rare instances when literary production triggers a 'pizza effect' in terms of revival of consciousness about a shared littoral heritage spanning the Bay of Bengal.

Conclusions

Through the literary works of Amitav Ghosh this paper tries to explore the possibility of 'pizza effect' being produced through literature. 'Pizza effect' was conceived by Bharti to explain the evolution of religious practices in India. This is a process of 'self-orientalisation.' Religious practices or rituals that may have never existed, once produced through a distorted interpretation of another ritual or religious practice in the West find credence in the native community. It would be wrong to claim that this paper is the first instance of elaborating on the idea of the 'pizza effect' in books or culture. For instance, Bharti points out that the status enjoyed by the Bhagavadgīta as the pre-eminent Hindu religious text is also a result of the 'pizza effect.' The Bhagavadgīta is after all not a canonical text like the Vedas or the Upaniṣads; but a *smṛti*.[22] The translation of the text by Annie Besant into English was read by Mahatma Gandhi in London who popularized the text and it attained canonical status in Hinduism (Bharti 274-75). Thus, Beasant's translation of the Bhagavadgīta created a 'pizza effect' in inducing a religious phenomenon of revering what until then had been an ordinary text.

Bharati goes on to elaborate that the 'pizza effect' is seen not only in religion but also in culture. He gives the example of how the Oscar winning filmmaker Satyajit Ray's movie trilogy (The "Apu" Trilogy) and other productions were flops in India. However, their popularity in the West particularly of the first movie of the trilogy—*Pāther Pancāli*—helped his movies to attain 'classic' status in India (Bharati 273).

This paper aims to show that the process of 'self orientalisation' through the 'pizza effect' need not be restricted in terms of religious practices, growing credence of a text or movie but also in terms of memory. The works of Amitav Ghosh invoke nostalgia for a shared littoral heritage and literary production in/of the labyrinths of the Bengal and Burma deltas. This shared littoral heritage and culture spanned centuries and the nature of this relationship changed over time but was never fully disrupted until the appearance of rigid national boundaries in the wake of decolonization. On the one hand, the fictions of Ghosh invoke the rituals of the past slowly fading under the weight of modernization and urbanization, on the other hand they invoke a lost world of shared deltaic culture and memory. If the 'pizza effect' produced by Ghosh's writings revives the possibilities of what was and what could have been, it inadvertently also produces a distorted view. These works of fiction and non-fiction invoke a time long past and beautifully re-create the past, but Burma is no longer a 'timeless golden land,' it is fast modernizing and urbanizing just as the Sundarbans of Bengal. The works of Ghosh and the 'pizza effect' they produce in reviving a suppressed collective memory of these connections help bring these people and areas back into mainstream conversation, but it is to be seen how far the 'pizza effect' induced memories help to reach

[22] In the Hindu tradition, the Vedas have the status of shruti (literally, 'that which has been heard'). They are thought to embody an eternal, self-existent truth realized by the rishis (seers) in a state of meditation or revealed to them by the gods. The category of *smṛti* (literally, 'remembered') texts includes the Vedanga, Puranas, epics (The *Bhagavadgīta* is part of the epic Mahabharata), Dharmashastra, and Nitishastra. For further details see: Upinder Singh—*A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: from the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education, 2008.

out these people—the fisher folk of the Sundarbans or the Rohingya who find themselves at the margins of society.

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The Strain of Language in China Miéville's *Embassytown*: Between Multiculturalism, Oppression, and the Alien Society

Abstract: Speculative fiction has long escaped the label of 'frivolous' literature, garnering respect in its continuous urge towards self-reflection through contrastive narratives. Given that the created languages of fiction, regardless of genre, are written with the overt purpose of being analyzed as intrinsic constituents of the fictional universes to which they belong, the intention behind created languages strips the narrative of an organic language development component, thus leaving behind only a language imbued with purpose reflected in the paradigm, the shifting syntax, vocabulary, and word choice, which aims to aid in the fleshing out of the fictional universe in which it resides.
The present paper aims to analyze the language of the Ariekei (known as Language) in China Miéville's *Embassytown* and the implications presented by the occurrence of a language functioning within the parameters of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the strain it poses on the interaction between cultures. As this paper is part of a doctoral thesis, the scope of the paper is restrained, to account for the present limitations. As such, the analysis will aim to highlight the main aspects of Language and Host culture and perception, and how these elements interact with the perceived notion of humanity.

Keywords: alien language, created language, translation, cultural adaptation, oppression through language

Introduction

With multiculturalism becoming the new norm at an accelerated pace, given the environment granted by globalization and the perpetual connection to the Internet, it is no wonder that many works of fiction have begun an exploration of what exactly multiculturalism entails, and science fiction is no stranger to this exploration. The status of 'migrant' is discussed from autobiographical memoirs to the speculative fiction set in the distant corners of the universe (if not this universe specifically), bringing into discussion not only the uncertainty of being acquainted to a culture far remote, but also the uncertainty and unreliability of communication—both between different species, but between humans as well.

Speculative fiction has long escaped the label of 'frivolous' literature, garnering respect in its continuous urge towards self-reflection through contrastive narratives. Given that the created languages of fiction, regardless of genre, are written with the overt purpose of being analyzed as intrinsic constituents of the fictional universes to which they belong, the intention behind created languages strips the narrative of an organic language development component, thus leaving behind only a language imbued with purpose reflected in the paradigm, the shifting syntax, vocabulary, and word choice which aims to aid in the fleshing out of the fictional universe in which it resides. As such language becomes the scaffolding upon which the narrative rests, both in terms of the plot and in terms of the credibility of the established defamiliarized setting.

The present paper aims to analyze the language of the Ariekei (known as Language) in China Miéville's *Embassytown* and the implications presented by the occurrence of a language functioning within the

prescribed parameters of the Sapir-Whorf[23] hypothesis and the strain it poses on the interaction between cultures. As this paper is part of a doctoral thesis, the scope of the paper is restrained, to account for the present limitations. As such, the analysis will aim to highlight the main aspects of Language and Host culture and perception, and how this felicitous coexistence of the races present in the novel hinges on an imperfect method of communication, subject to influence both from external and internal forces.

With science fiction historically being perceived to defamiliarize not through language but through the discrepancy between the presented status quo and the one of the reader (Scholes, qtd. in Mandala 38), the analyzed work will contain an estrangement conducted not only through this aforementioned discrepancy, but also and mainly through the use of unfamiliar language and how it changes the framework through which the fictional universe is perceived. As such, in the imagined worlds of science fiction, the future forms of language and their structure are never devoid of an intentional history that is to be gleaned from them.

Miéville and his work, especially *Embassytown,* if not all his works, delve into this both cultural and personal estrangement experienced by his characters. *Embassytown*, published in 2011, explores both the particular language and the culture of estrangement, weaving together the tension created by the limitations of language with that created by the common theme of the "colonizing impulse" present in science fiction (Grewell 26). Humans, or rather, Terres, as they call themselves, settle on Arieka in an attempt to establish communication with the alien race, The Hosts, as they come to call them. After years of attempts, once communication between them is established with the aid of the fabricated Ambassadors, the Terres decide to continue their cohabitation with the Hosts, and establish the Embassytown in the outpost, engaging in matters spanning from trade to the expansion of the Host language.

The continued coexistence of the Hosts with the Terres, though the narrative hints at there being more cultures present on the outpost, though none of them pose an influence as great as that of the Terre, does not trigger the decay of Ariekene Language. However, this continued interaction accelerates the process of transmutation of language, and through language, thought itself experiences change, for the Hosts.

This process is seen by both the Ariekei and the Terre as either something to strive for or something to oppose, depending on how opportune an event it was perceived to be. As such, skirmishes arise not only between the humans and the Hosts, but also among the Hosts themselves, culminating with the orchestrated assassination of a Host liar by an element of Language itself, that is, a human character who had been previously enLanguaged by the Hosts, a process by which humans aid in the Host language expansion.

Sapir-Whorf, Language and Oppression

The universe depicted by China Miéville in *Embassytown* is not one that would operate in the realia, instead the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is applied in a surreal setting, creating a context for a broader discussion concerning language, and the boundaries it creates not only between cultures, but between worlds. As Will Nediger says in "Whorfianism in Colonial Encounters from Melville to Miéville": "For them, speech is necessarily tied to thought. They are unable to think anything that they cannot say, and unable to say anything that they cannot think. This is the ultimate form of Whorfianism" (30).

[23] Will Nediger, in "Whorfianism in Colonial Encounters: from Melville to Mieville" discusses the application of the hypothesis, delineating two versions: "There are strong and weak versions of this hypothesis: the strong version states that language determines aspects of cognition (as in the formulation above, that it is impossible to think in ways that are not permitted by one's language), while the weak version states that language merely affects cognition" (21).

While the language of the Hosts is never overtly referred to as Sapir-Whorfian in its functioning, the description of Language as analyzed by the characters places it within the aforementioned paradigm:

> Does it ever occur to you that this Language is impossible, Avice? (...) It makes no sense. They don't have polysemy. Words don't signify: they are the referents. How can they be sentient and not have symbolic language? How do their numbers work. It makes no sense. And Ambassadors are twins, not single people. There's not one mind behind Language when they speak it…(...) The Ariekei think they're hearing one mind but they're not (...) we can only talk to them because of a mutual misunderstanding. What we call their words aren't words: they don't, you know, signify. And what they call our minds aren't our minds at all. (93)

The Ariekei, an already pre-established culture on Arieka, possess a peculiar speech, one which contradicts the very foundation of human perception and linguistics. For the creatures, sentient and two-mouthed, there is no signifier, there is no referent, their minds do not allow for the unreal, not even when the unreal is a hypothesis relating to the future. To them, language creates a link to the truth, a link to the world that transcends.

They cannot lie, under the limitations of their minds and language, and a chief festival for them is the Festival of Lies, where the most skilled of them make use of cadence and other such tactics in an attempt to create a mere approximation of an untruth, which they have yet to achieve.

A language with imperfect referents, where truth and unequivocal statements are not the only possibilities, both delights and upsets the Ariekene. As such, the establishment of the Festival of Lies, where Ariekei and Ambassadors strive to, and respectively, easily state lies, becomes a focal point of the culture of Arieka from the moment the Ariekei discover this ability of the Terre. The celebrations, taking place inside the Host town, where inhabitants of Embassytown cannot come due to the unbreathable atmosphere, are a show of skill, and a tentative attempt at most, of the Ariekei, to state untruths, or to verge as much as possible into the domain of lying.

While similes existed in their language long before the first understood interaction with humans ("They made similes long before you touched down" (63)), the need for such things became more urgent, more varied, more nuanced, and oftentimes involved the willing or unwilling participation of humans, the only ones to successfully interact with the Hosts. For them to expand language, there is a level of empathy, of shared need between them, that translates into actions they cannot yet speak of. This need of theirs for language expansion does not materialize itself for free, when the participation of humans is required. Humans barter for it, ask for "biorigging," for materials only made by the Ariekei, conditioning the expansion of their language. As such, aiding in the creation of thought, language agency becomes a thing that is capitalized on, rarely, if never, refused, yet always coming under certain imposed conditions.

As Greg Grewell states, when it comes to the overlap of the theme of postcolonialism in the science fiction genre: "the science fiction industry has essentially borrowed from, technologically modernized, and recast the plots, scenes, and tropes of the literature of earthly colonization" (26). China Miéville's *Embassytown* is no stranger to this theme which pervades the narrative. However, it does offer a critique of the experience, striving to showcase this struggle through the prism of language.

The Hosts, without the existence of a true referent, cannot even conceive of notions, let alone articulate thoughts into Language. As such, for the purpose of both thought and speech, their language is enriched by way of similes which they orchestrate, as Cho—the main character—narrates in the novel, 'ghost thought.' These similes are not always a one-time event, nor are they the only fabricated parts of the Language. The Ariekei also have ongoing similes, among which is Hasser, or "the man who swims every week with fishes" (123), later known as "the man who swam every week with fishes and is dead" (186). There are examples, and topics, yet they are not a subject which is delved into during the course of the novel. The chief element which is discussed are the similes, and how by their mere existence they can aid

in bridging that distance from real to unreal. But the expanded Language is not only performed with the aid of the animated. There are inanimate objects and animals which the Ariekei have enLanguaged, like "split and fixed rock" (63) and other such examples. However, there is a certain penchant for human involvement which betrays a desire to bring their culture closer to that of the Terres. There is variety in language expansion with the Ariekei, spanning further than the 'split and fixed' rock. Their language has shifted to accommodate sufficient new elements as to trigger another Celebration, this time of Language itself, where they gather "as many enLanguaged elements as possible—animate, inanimate, sentient and not—and [the Ariekei] come look at us, and theorize us" (11).

While at a first glance it may appear that the universe is governed by a purely Sapir-Whorfian paradigm, however, as the narrative progresses, we are made aware not only of different plots centering around language, but also of these notions of foreshadowing language creation. The urges the character Spanish Dancer recounts as driving them to speak (393) and to utter things into existence point towards the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis being imperfect even in this fictional setting. However, in order to alter the dynamic of language creation in such a way that would turn the Ariekei from users of a language feeling the internal need[24] to expand language,[25] to Language itself demanding it be expanded,[26] Language becomes unfamiliar enough to almost, in itself, create a character within the narrative.

As the linguist present in the narrative himself says: "They've no what-ifs (...) At best, it must be like a pre-ghost in their head. Everything in Language is a truth claim. So, they need the similes to compare things to, to make true things that aren't there yet, that they need to say. It might not be that they can think of it: maybe Language just demands it. That soul" (64). Repeatedly, within the novel, Language itself acts as a character, triggering both conflicts and the occurrence of decay, a 'linguistic apocalipse' (Miéville qtd. in Hynes 287) that brings about both the resolution and the widespread alteration of Language.

With the scope of the paper being that of illustrating the way in which created fictional languages are used with relation to the plot, we do not intend to also analyze the fictional English employed in the construction of the novel, specifically Anglo-Ubiq, and the relationship thereof with the main alien language.

While Miéville uses 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin qtd. in Weakland 78) to shift the perception of the reader upon language, it is not just the language of the Ariekei that falls under this scrutiny. Through the complex use of plot and narrative devices, Miéville also places the languages of the Terre under analysis, even if perhaps the analysis is not as comprehensive, as Anglo-Ubiq's role in the main plot mainly serves as a way of identifying the discrepancies between the two language paradigms: "Miéville encodes an array of discourses concerning language into his story of humanity's encounter with the Ariekei, whose speech, unique in the novel's universe, estranges us from our own language and allows us to confront language's strange materiality and almost magical efficacy" (Weakland 78).

For Scile, the linguist obsessed with Language, the existence of Language is vital; not only that, but he is adamant that any alteration of the Language would only be to the detriment of Hosts and the purity of their Language. The increase in similes, especially those requiring human interaction, becomes unsettling to him, as Language, as the language of the Hosts is named, in a rudimentary fashion betraying the true importance of it, that of a primordial, superior language, which does not need another name to describe it, continues to bear so many alterations, acquiring similes with increasing frequency.

[24] called "the pre-ghost [of thought]" (64) by linguist Scile

[25] the Ariekei were thought to be in the incipit

[26] the Ariekei themselves retroactively describe the experience of being limited by their language ("We didn't speak so much of certain things. Language spoke us. The words that wanted to be city and machines had us speak them so they could be" (393)).

His adamant statement, "We had to misunderstand Language to learn it" (64), therefore, refers not only to the inherent limitation of people, of humans, to learn Language in its purest form, but also to the fact that the continued human interaction with the Hosts through the Ambassadors makes this human misunderstanding of Language bleed into their own thoughts.

The increase of similes points to this, as well as the invention of the Festival of Lies, with Hosts striving to emulate both the human ability to lie and the human misunderstanding of Language, pointing towards the gradual appropriation of human culture and paradigms.

Any language, when not spoken by a native, is a misunderstanding of it, an approximation molded on already-established patterns we acquire as children. However, when it comes to existing languages, it is true that there are core similarities, which allow for a better approximation of said language. With Language, however, this pattern is inadequate, as there is a glaring cognitive difference between humans and Hosts in what concerns not only speech but also thought. The Ariekei, colonized by their own interest, not in human language, but in human thought, present a danger to Language that Scile cannot tolerate ("I'd gleaned more scraps of Scile's emergent theology. (...) He wants to protect the Ariekei. From changing Language."), resorting to drastic measures, in order to preserve Language, showcasing the power dynamics of a language struggle where he attempts to take agency away from the users of Language (164).

Any interaction with the Hosts is mediated, a communication that undergoes not only the process of translation and adaptation, but also the implied censorship of the institution governing the Ambassadors. This monopoly over interaction and the process of fabricating Ambassadors leads to more than one issue regarding the interaction with the society of Arieka.

While it is true that interaction with the Hosts is only possible with the aid of Ambassadors, the willing and systematic restriction of interaction between the non-Ambassadors and the Hosts leads to gaps in perception that even the characters themselves analyze within the narrative, pointing towards the implication that Hosts do not regard simple Terres as individual human entities: "'Tallying Mystery.' Did the Ariekei think an Ambassador was one person or two? Staff had always told us it was a pointless, untranslatable, impolite question. (...) 'It's never been something Ambassadors have been exactly keen to make clear'" (359).

While Ambassadors are subjected to this scrutiny while actively engaging with the Hosts, the topic of whether Hosts consider individual Terres as being human is not clearly discussed until the very end of the novel. This also brings into discussion the general perception of the Ambassadors by their own society and the treatment they receive when they can no longer perform their duties, due to certain circumstances, such as, the loss of one of the Ambassador pair.

The perception of lessened Ambassadors, one doppel who had lost the other, is that of a shameful, crippled person who should not live within the city, as we learn from the first few pages of the novel depicting Cho's first interaction with Bren, formerly known as BrenDan, now BrenDan. It is curious to notice that the perception of humans who are lacking limbs is not the same, and is thus limited to the role and perception of Ambassadors alone. This ostracization acts upon not only lessened, but undoppeled Ambassadors, leading to the internalized culture of shame regarding Ambassadors regaining individuality. It is not the doppel that is "unsightly" (16), but the notion that while one doppel ceased to exist, the other continues to age and shift in ways that do not match the deceased doppel: "I don't think it's right of him to live like that, in town" and "its… unseemly(...) it isn't good to see. That kind of wound" (16).

Ambassadors, we are made aware, are bred in 'farms' for the sole purpose of interacting with the Hosts. As Cho coldly puts it "If you raised them right, taught them to think of themselves right, wired them with links, then they could speak Language, with close enough to one sentience that the Ariekei could understand it" (66).

Therefore, this necessity to communicate with the Hosts becomes not only an incentive for skewing mass perception of the Hosts, it also becomes the excuse used for the dehumanization of Ambassador pairs, who live under the societal expectation of being the extended consciousness of the same mind mirrored in two bodies. Oppression is a double-edged sword in the universe of Embassytown, and while the Ariekei do not possess the knowledge they need to become aware of it, the Ambassadors certainly do, rebelling against it, just as Bremen, the mother colony, is aware of Embassytown rebelling against their control.

While Language is the token currency of the power struggle, it is easy to deduce that the Ariekei are caught in the middle of a decidedly *human* struggle for power and independence, while their own ideas on independence of thought are just beginning to gain shape.

The Strain of Translation

Again, even in matters concerning the functioning and perception of the universe, we are shown how improper translation is, put into a framework of unreliability that leads to the wreckage of the ship travelling through the "immer," only to misinterpret the warning signals of the wreck as a beacon, a message waiting to be received. Thus, we are put in a position of becoming aware that perceptions are altered by the medium through which we perceive them. For the Ariekei, the world is as Language wishes it to be, and only stretches as far as the pre-ghosts of Language expansion allow. For Cho, and for all inhabitants of Embassytown, their understanding and perception of the Ariekei are mediated by Staff and Ambassadors, their perceptions invariably skewed in order to aid the Staff in their desire to become autonomous and break away from Bremen.

Even the "miabs," the "immer" ships conducting trade and upholding communication between the world and colonies, become subject to the time passing between their transmission and reception, emulating messages adapted for an audience of the past, which in the end will lead to Embassytown having the upperhand in expecting the next shipment and using it to their advantage, given that Bremen is unaware of the crisis taking place within Embassytown and the language apocalypse disrupting the status quo of the inhabiting societies.

As the Ariekei communicate through the use of similes, it is pointed even by Weakland that there is no certitude that the Ariekei really do perceive them as such, being governed by a language paradigm that differs so greatly that one can only wonder whether 'simile' would be the proper term to describe them (Weakland 85). However, this brings to light another issue of translation and adaptation by using cognates, unwittingly skewing both meaning and the perception thereof, as each word is imbued with its own related information.

This draws back to the description of the Ariekei, with words one would assume have the standard meaning, only to witness them being used in cognitively estranging settings (such as the 'eye-corals' of the Ariekei).

Cho herself, in her experience with enLanguaging, broaches the subject of discrepancies between the two cultures, not only that but also the willful withholding of information from those participating in interactions with the Hosts. Cho is a simile described as, "There was a human girl who in pain ate what was given to her in an old room built for eating in which eating had not happened for a time," which would, with time, as the characters themselves postulate, become "the girl who ate what was given to her" (28). While the Hosts interpret her as "an expression intended to invoke surprise and irony, a kind of resentful fatalism" (28), Cho, even in her retroactive recounting of the narrative, having arguably gained knowledge pertaining to the culture of the Ariekei, continues to call the experience of becoming Language as "the least comprehensible event that had or has ever happened to [her]" (26). As much as translation involves a certain degree of violence, an imperfect transposition of referents, for the Ariekei, culture and their

interactions with different cultures represent much of the same violence. Their need to verbalize becomes pressing, and the realization that their own language is not enough is a catalyst for the decay of Ariekene language. As Weakland himself postulates (Weakland 92), by being presented with such alien Language, that of the Ariekei, we cannot but start considering our own language as alien, the estranging effect of the fictional universe bleeding into our own perception of language and forcing us to consider it from a different perspective: "While Embassytown never comes back at length to interrogate its own status as writing, as a recursive metafiction might, the more general discursive activities of speaking, writing, and reading certainly become a little alien after our encounter with the fictional Ariekei" (Weakland 92).

The speech of Spanish Dancer, though laced with elements to trigger a separation from Language in its audience, serves as a comparison to the perception of the Ariekei by the Embassytown society, but most of all by Cho. Throughout the novel the events narrated were filtered by Cho's perception, and her then-understanding of the events. The speech of Spanish Dancer is the only uninterrupted fragment within the novel where there is no intervention on the part of Cho with respect to her own reception of the matter.

From a postcolonial point of view, this serves to show the perception of the Ariekei themselves, Spanish Dancer serving as a mouthpiece for the collective experience of their society with Language. Their account of it, as one would expect, being completely devoid of any symbolism like that inferred by Scile, imbued with religious meaning (Weakland 93).

The Loss of Language as Freedom

The loss of Language comes therefore not as a punishment, but as a natural evolution of sustained communication between two diverging cultures. The shifts in Language were already present, and had been present since the interaction between the two species began, with the only difference being that the fall from Language was accelerated out of a need to eliminate addiction to the god-drug: "Similes start…transgressions. Because we can refer to anything. Even though in Language, everything's literal. Everything is what it is, but still, I can be like the dead and the living. And the stars and a desk and fish and anything. Surl Tesh-Echer knew that was Language straining…bust out of itself. To signify" (345).

The Ariekei-internal perception of Language we are allowed to glimpse through the perspective of Cho allows us to also understand that within the Ariekene society there is growing discussion surrounding Language and the expansion thereof, the formation thereof, and how its users would like to see it shift to accommodate their yet-unborn thoughts, which if we disregard the last part is entirely similar to how human language is analyzed, discussed, and scrutinized without the fictional universe.

The estranging effect of these discussions surrounding Language with the Ariekei only estrange the reader with the presence of humans as reminders of the similes they embody, viewed as in a museum and discussed as if they were not present, since the language barrier (or rather, Language barrier) did not allow for the Ariekei to perceive discussion with anyone else but the Ambassadors.

As Cho once said, the perception of the humans, especially similes, by the Ariekei, as speaking a language of their own only takes shape when Cho forces the Ariekei to understand that her utterances have meaning behind them. It is easy to determine from that fact that the boundaries between the two cultures would not have been as great, were it not for the willful withholding of such information by the Ambassadors.

"*Language was never possible*. *We never spoke in one voice*" (366). The statement, uttered by Spanish Dancer, becomes indicative of the state in which they lived prior to disentangling themselves from Language. They never spoke in one voice, yet they were confined to the same voice, valences muted by the impossibility of Language to accommodate all nuances of speech. We now have to briefly acknowledge

Wittgenstein's theory,[27] reminiscent of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*: "'the limits of my language signify the limits of my world'" (...) Hence, that which is conceived as the limit of the world must also be conceived as being at the limit of language" and the implications thereof in a context in which it becomes unquestionably true (Sluga and Stern 329).

While the strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was never a fully applicable hypothesis regarding the functioning of actual, real language, when it is applied to fictional languages designed within the parameters of such hypotheses and statements, we can extract that not even for them was this prison of language devoid of a yearning for more, for going beyond. In the present case the desire of the Ariekei is reflected in the similes, in their aspiration to lie, in the desire to assimilate human culture to the point of their breaking with the paradigm of their own thought-language-world. As Hynes states, "[t]he Festival of Lies shows that the Ariekei feel the need for an outlet for their propensity to strain against the limits of Language, while at the same time emphasizing that to actually break those limits is viewed as unacceptable and dangerous by the Ariekene authorities" (286).

The natural progression of the Ariekei in distancing themselves from Language becomes an imperative with the arrival of EzRa, dubbed the god-drug, whose nature as an imperfect Ambassador creates an addicting effect on the Ariekei, to the point of subjugating their wills. The 'cures' for this addiction become either the loss of Language through attaining human perception, or the loss of Language through the loss of their hearing, which also robs them of any voiced communication between themselves: "There is no cure. Spanish and the others...they might not be addicted anymore but they're not cured: they're changed. That's what it is. I know it might sound the same, but do you understand they can't speak Language, anymore, MagDa? Anymore than you ever could" (387).

Once this boundary is breached, the Ariekei can move forward to help others escape from Language. And while many do not desire so, as previous believers in the purity of Language, it is, given the circumstances, the only way for them to be free of the god-drug. Not only to instruct the Language-able Ariekei, but to also show the Absurd—those who deafened themselves—that they themselves were creating language in the absence of Language:

> The gesticulations were information, motion telegrams. Talking. They didn't understand each other but they knew there was something to understand. And that was liberation. When they did make communication—something ridiculous, Spanish throwing a pulpy bud then pointing into the muttering wildlife where it lay, and the Absurd picking it up—their euphoria, even alien, was palpable. (369)

For Cho, many particularities of Ariekene society remain hard to discern in the beginning, regardless of the unfettered communication that they are able to sustain. However, this is not due to the unfathomable alienness of the Ariekei, merely a by-product of the sustained ambiguity and lack of understanding of the Ariekei the Staff and Embassy propagated among the inhabitants of Embassytown. Hailing the Ariekei as unfathomable beings that cannot, to their full extent, be known and understood, created a distancing, masked as reverence, of the Terre, and other races inhabiting Embassytown, from the Ariekei. With the boundaries to interaction lifted, communication and understanding can begin, however stilted. Yet the beginning of it still poses difficulties even for Cho. "'Theuth mostly speaks for the Languageless now. Spanish is talking to us—to YlSib, obviously, but it can even…' MagDa hadn't seen Spanish and me in the evenings: talking, haltingly" (387).

[27] A more in-depth approach to Wittgenstein and the way his postulations relate to the application of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis exceed the scope of the paper. However, for more on the limitations of language within the works of Miéville please see: Will Nediger—"Whorfianism in Colonial Encounters from Melville to Miéville." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2014, pp. 19–34. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44029859

With the liberation from the confines of Language, Spanish Dancer becomes not only its own master, free of god-drug, but also becomes a proponent of teaching others, be they the addicted Ariekei or the deafened Absurd, that they can become freed through metaphor or that they can already communicate, respectively. Its [as the Ariekei are referred to with the pronouns it/its] interactions with the Terre, once the realization that there is more to communication than Language dawns on it, is followed by an increasing usage of Anglo-Ubiq, harmonized from both mouths to create the language, doubled as if spoken by two people in tandem.

It is with the aforementioned that we face the sacrifice of the Ariekei. For them to escape being enthralled, they had to escape their defining feature. The core element of their culture and their beings had to be eliminated for them to be able to continue existing outside the compulsions of the god-drug. This is where the true violence of inter-cultural relations lies in the narrative. For them to continue existing, they must cast away their old ways, their thoughts, their perceptions, and adopt those of the Terre, imbued with a symbolism that allows them to evade the god-drug.

> They were going to kill us because we were the source of the god-drugs. They knew it was too late for them, they were lost, but they were going to make a totally new start for those after them if they got rid of the problem. Us. You understand how selfless they were? It wouldn't help them. It was for their kids. This generation would either be deadened, dead or dying in withdrawal.
> But now they know they can be cured (...) And if they can be cured then we're an irrelevance. That I why we get to live. See? But they still have to be cured. That's the condition. Otherwise, we're still sickness. And it takes time to cure oratees. (...) So [EzCal's] job is to keep them going in the meantime till they don't need you anymore. Without you to tide them, the addicted'll start to die. Too quick to be cured, or even deafened. So, you have to keep them alive. (388-389)

Conclusions

While it is true that by no means does *Embassytown* cover all aspects of a created alien language, the language of the hosts is the scaffolding upon which the main plot rests. The conflicts that arise within the novel, offer, if not clear answers, the hints at more than one comes to expect from Miéville's brand of writing. The rigid Language of the Ariekei, even speculated in the novel to be close to obsolescence, is presented in its dying moments as a contrastive element to the Anglo-Ubiq of the narrative, a comparatively flexible language, offering freedom of thought, yet also imperfect in establishing communication.

With the aim of the paper being that of illustrating the way in which fictional languages shape the fictional universe, it is unequivocal that Language, even in its fragmentary state of presentation, offers the reader a gateway into an Ariekene society and their implied history, while also serving as a means of measuring one's own language against it.

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Hyperglossia in Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*

Abstract: Using Édouard Glissant's vision of 'poetics of relation,' I intent to demonstrate how Olga Tokarczuk's novel Flights (2007; 2017) turns significantly responsive to what I have termed 'hyperglossia.' Hyperglossia proposes a magnification of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, in recognition that today's world is informed by discourses that not only complete and complement each other, but also exceed the individual's capacity to assemble one reality. If heteroglossia encompasses another's speech in another's language (Bakhtin), hyperglossia appeals to both the form that speech acquires and its precedence as utterance (the polyphonic aspect), as it is processed by the writer. Hyperglossia is rhizomatic, hypertextual, and exponential. It is a continuum of fluidity and indeterminacy that challenges Western patterns of reading and thought. On the light of this, I propose a reading of Tokarczuk's *Flights* as a hyperglossic text in functions determined by the fragmentation of the narrative voice(s).

Keywords: hyperglossia, hypertext, heteroglossia, assemblage, rhizome, bodies without organs

Introduction

Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights* (2017) is a work of art comprised by 116 vignettes freely interconnected by the sense of nomadism as creative act. Of course, a reading journey manifests motion, but in this novel, we encounter with a kinesis of desire and its shadow, which is stillness. Stasis. The stagnant. Or the dead. Tokarczuk's use of fragmentation in the novel is not innovative in itself and lacks the ergodic challenges of, say, Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* or Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, but it instills and resignifies the brokenness of the novel in the twenty-first century. Flights discards the self-contained narrative puzzles that distinguish Cortazar's and Danielewski's aforementioned works and, in its place, creates an outward narrative movement that, as a whole, expands on the notion of depth. Such notion of profundity suggests that the novel as a genre might have morphed into a new artifact which is characterized by its multilinear possibilities where, as Michel Foucault stated in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, the boundaries of the text are "never clear-cut," because it is a nodal network of other books, texts, and discourses in general.

Within the text itself, however, as an inherent characteristic of the novelistic language, Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the capacity of the signifier to exist separately but in continuous dialectics with other signifiers in an orchestrated polyphony as a distinctive trait of the novel, as seen in "Epic and Novel." In *Flights*, the polyphonic aspect of the novel is not restrained to the operations of language, but also adapts to particular blocks of texts that simulate the electronic hypertext. Flights, the material novel, is a product of traditional book media, not electronic. Yet, it mimics the multilinear non-sequentiality of hypertext and processes it as what I will call hyperglossia, or the semantic mapping and structural scaffolding of Tokarczuk's novel. Thus, departing from Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and Landow's hypertext, I propose to interpret the granularity of Tokarczuk's novel as textual reproduction that exceeds the limits of the text itself, allowing multiple reading paths that reflect the way we construct knowledge in the Internet era: rhizomatically.

In *Flights*, Tokarczuk levels the diegesis of the novel with an autopoietic system, which, according to Hans Dieter Huber's "Internet Theory," produces the components out of which it exists out of the components of which it consists. The components are single communication units, and they produce further communications.

Tokarczuk ultimately attains what Derrida announced in *Dissemination* as a new, freer, richer form of text, one truer to our potential experience, perhaps to our actual if unrecognized experience that would be dependable on discrete reading units.

Now, our occidental reading pattern (left to right, top to bottom) and the book-artifact bracket where the novel begins and where it ends. Although the operations within are not so linear, the text provides a departure point from the first vignette, titled "Here I Am," which sounds like prophecy fulfilled. It is the locus of the novel and it takes the reader to a commonplace, stated with anguish: "I realize that I am trapped." This is the matrix of the nodal system. "I would like to go out, but I have nowhere to go," the narrator adds. And immediately she discovers the truth: "There is nothing to do, I exist, here I am." We should be looking at this "I," this self that cannot or does not want to be contained in these brief notes that vary in theme and length as a textual form of nomadism. In fact, the narrative paces through the awakening of the narrator's self-awareness as a series of movements comparable to a mystical pilgrimage, which invites the notion of Bakhtin's chronotope as well. However, my concern with this virtual splitting of the diegesis will pertain as to the abstractions of time rather than the specificities of place. Tokarczuk's novel, it should be regarded, is not conceived as an electronic text. Instead, it simulates more what the author herself calls "a cabinet of curiosities."

Therefore, the reader might approach the novel without a particular reading scheme just as one would open the drawers of a cabinet to discover its contents. Moreover, non-digital literary works might contain elements of hypertextuality, which at times might be self-evident, as is the case with Cortázar's *Rayuela* (whose chapters can be read following two different paths suggested by the author), but also as with the case of Macedonio Fernández's *Museo de la Novela Eterna* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, whose paths are not that obviously forked, but still depend on the ergodic role of the reader. From a Derridean perspective, I could say there is assemblage of textuality that marks or foregrounds the writing process and therefore rejects a deceptive transparency. My first step towards my reading of Flights will be to visit Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia before I enter the hyperglossic realm.

The Artistic System in the Novel

In his seminal *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of polyphony as a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (5). The engagement and merging of voices emerge then as a unique characteristic of prose novels as they represent a variety of ideological positions. Voices—consciousness and characters—exist separately as they engage in dialectical interexchange. Therefore, there is an imperative socialism that equalizes the characters and their speech, creates tensions, and does not privilege a particular point of view. Polyphony yields to the universal, which prioritizes the multiplicity of voices where the authorial presence is merely one component of a vast network of enunciating instances. Polyphony, then, is of dialogic nature just as the novel is multiform in speech and style. Polyphonic plurality is inherent to how language is used or applied. It can be defined as diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized (262). This many-languagedness creates what Bakhtin denominates as polyglossia, the system of another's speech in another's language.

The adhesion and deformation of languages within this dialogism that sparks from such friction permeate all human communication in different levels of social exchange. Language cannot exist in isolation, and neither do the writers of literary works. The implied elasticity and scope of communicational environments inform the meaning of words without a sense of closure and without a hierarchical center or overruling voice. Bakhtin says:

> The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole where the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its "languages." (262)

The idea of heteroglossia, or how a language is dialogized from within, blooms from the separate elements of a novel's language, which is determined by the stylistic unity of the work. Whereas polyglossia dialogizes language from without, the internal stratification of heteroglossia, present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence, is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. Bakhtin contends that:

> The linguistic and stylistic profile of a given element (lexical, semantic, syntactic) is shaped by that subordinated unity to which it is most immediately proximate. At the same time this element, together with its most immediate unity, figures into the style of the whole, itself supports the accent of the whole and participates in the process whereby the unified meaning of the whole is structured and revealed. (262)

Heteroglossia enters the novel through fundamental compositional unities, such as authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters, dialogized with each other. These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types and its dialogization is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel ("Discourse in the Novel" 263). The language of a text is never neutral. On the contrary, it is a moving, living thing. In heteroglossia, the meanings are generated by the primacy of the context over the text.

Heteroglossia favors multiplicity over unitary meanings. Flights combines essayistic reflections, fictional stories, and fictionalized histories, varying in length from thirty-odd pages to a paragraph or two, interwoven around two main themes: travel and the preservation of the human body. We hear the narrator's reflections as she travels through an endless succession of airports, which she considers a new human habitat (Gasper Bye 64).

Flights is bigger than the sum of its parts. This is the mark of hyperglossia.

Bigger than the Sum of Its Parts: Hyperglossia

Bieguni, in its original Polish edition, was published in Poland in 2007 and translated into English as *Flights* by Jennifer Croft in 2017. In the Spanish speaking world, however, the novel had been around almost simultaneously with the original publication and it was released as *Los errantes*, as translated by Agata Orzeszek in 2007. As paratext, the translation of the title insinuates a particular scenography of speech. Agnieska Piotrowska, Polish academic and writer herself, asserts that:

> 'Bieguni' is not a proper word in Polish, or at least not a word anybody would know in Poland (Tokarczuk explains in the novel that 'bieguni' is the name of an ancient nomadic tribe, which may or may not be the case, but in any event, I have never heard of it and neither has anybody I have spoken to). 'Bieguni' sounds as if, etymologically, it has something to do with 'running' ('biegac') but also with the word 'poles' as in 'the North Pole' ('bieguny' would be the plural of 'the Pole'). The title therefore sounds strangely uncanny, foreign, exotic, and yes, evokes a sense travel of the kind Tokarczuk writes about that is not easily definable. (163)

If the title Flights evokes the notion of modernity, of moving from one place to another through a specific means of air transportation, in Spanish the word "errante" incites nomadism. It is, literally, a wanderer or globetrotter, which connotes walking over solid ground. The reason why I observe this issue is because

translations move into cultural contextualizations that trigger a heteroglossia in the operation. Moreover, the paratext is: "[T]he means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public. Rather than with a limit or a sealed frontier, we are dealing in this case with a threshold, or—the term Borges used about preface—with a 'vestibule' which offers to anyone and everyone the possibility either of entering or of turning back" (Genette 261).

As with any translation process, the case of Bieguni is paradoxical. *Flights* in English and *Los errantes* in Spanish do not portent a substitute for the original, and yet they do. *Flights* is to air as *Los errantes* is to earth. In a novel that structures movement as information, this is significant. Air travel, denoted in the English title, suggests what Deleuze and Guattari identify in *A Thousand Plateaus* as striated space: it is limited in its parts, which are assigned specific directions, oriented in relation to one another and limited by boundaries (382). Striated space suggests sedentariness, while, on the other hand, smooth space serves the deterritorialization of the nomad, the "errantes" who have no points, paths, or land (381). Smooth space is the ontological extension of Olga Tokarczuk's novel to the assemblage field that permits heteroglossia and polyglossia fuse into the rhizomatic realm of hyperglossia.

I define hyperglossia as a spill-over of the text. Uncontainable data that moves beyond mere speech and other languagedness. Thus, the language of a text cannot remain idle or neutral. If heteroglossia happens when the language of a character or the narrator changes from its normal discourse, speech, registries, as, for example, in social position, class, or nationality, hyperglossia enters the operative materialism of the contextual culture(s) of the text and amplifies its languages. If in heteroglossia the meanings of a text are generated by the primacy of the context over the text, hyperglossia is textual reproduction in parallel to contextual data. The result is a text that moves from within and from without simultaneously, recreating a notion of conscious endlessness, or a sign network of semiological value. If heteroglossia polarizes monologic and dialogic discourses within one rhetorical instance, hyperglossia reproduces rhetorical instances and breaks them down in monologic and dialogic discourses, thus yielding to the notion of hyper, as in hyperbole, the magnification of reality through exaggeration. Hyperglossia enters the novel through the strident silence of de-compositional unities, or compositional instabilities.

One example of hyperglossia in Flights deals with one of the threading concepts of the novel, which is the body, both literal and textual. Early in the novel, the narrator moves between perceptible, verifiable data and less obvious information that can only be accessed through magnification itself, which is, after all, what a clinical laboratory does.

> I have a practical build. I'm petite, compact. My stomach is tight, small, undemanding. My lungs and my shoulders are strong. I'm not on any prescriptions—not even the pill—and I don't wear glasses. I cut my hair with clippers, once every three months, and I use almost no make-up. My teeth are healthy, perhaps a bit uneven, but intact, and I have just one old filling, which I believe is located in my lower left canine. My liver function is within the normal range. As is my pancreas. Both my right and left kidneys are in great shape. My abdominal aorta is normal. My bladder works. Haemoglobin 12.7. Leukocytes 4.5. Haematocrit 41.6. Platelets 228. Cholesterol 204. Creatinine 1.0. Bilirubin 4.2. And so on. My IQ—if you put any stock in that kind of thing—is 121; it's passable. My spatial reasoning is particularly advanced, almost eidetic, though my laterality is lousy. Personality unstable, or not entirely reliable. Age all in your mind. Gender grammatical. (7)

In the passage, the narrative voice moves from the physical outlook of the self to the internal organicity of the body. It pendulates from parts to particles and back. She reads and translates the messages her own body transmits and goes from habitual twice-behaved behaviors to the biological. She is a whole complex entity, but her deliberate atomization makes her bigger than what she seems in the liminal dimension of existence. As she dives into her own bloodstream, one realizes that the information she provides on haematocrit, platelets, cholesterol, and the like, means nothing unless one is knowledgeable of the

relevant reference values required to understand the numbers. Unless one is acquainted with the interpretation of numbers and/or statistics (which are facts) in lab tests, there is no immediate understanding of the clinical language. Moreover, one needs a test to reach those statistical truths. And one needs an interpreter of the results to actually brag about the internal functions of one's body, a reality which not even the testee might be aware of. The whole sequence, it could be argued, is nothing but an impressionistic account of the biological body, but, in a novel about the displacement of the body, this is how hyperglossia works: it relates the obvious with the inconspicuous.

Similarly, there are other instances in *Flights* where knowledges are at work induced by hyperglossia. The next passage, titled "In Pursuit of the Night," appeals to a wider spectrum of knowledges that are necessary to make sense of such fragmented narrative work:

> On the bedside table there was a light blue pack of condoms. Right by the bed there was a Bible and the Teachings of the Buddha. Unfortunately, the plug for my electric kettle didn't fit into the socket—so I would have to do without tea. Although perhaps it was coffee I should be drinking at this hour? My body was in no state to interpret the numbers on the clock built into the radio on the bedside table, although it would appear that numerals are international, despite being known as Arabic. Was the yellow glow out the window the onset of dawn, or was it a dusk that had already largely condensed into night? It was hard to determine whether this part of the world—over which the sun was about to appear or else had just vanished – was the East or the West. I concentrated on counting up the hours I'd spent on the plane, employing as an aid an image I'd once seen on the internet of a globe with a nocturnal bar that moves from east to west like a giant mouth that systematically devours the world. (9

Here we move as a nomad from within and without different bodies of wisdom. The narrator is in a hotel room for a night and there are three artifacts: a pack of condoms, a Bible, and the Teachings of Buddha. The three elements function as individual prophylactic discourses but with different ends. Condoms are practical in protecting the individual against sexually transmitted diseases that might corrode the body; the Bible is the sacred book of the Christian religions, and it is the only religion that offers eternal life and resurrection of the body; and the teachings of the Buddha preach the body as mindfulness of the dharma, a transient shelter that one must renounce to attain Nirvana. Again, what is at play here might seem detached from other parts of the narrative, but ultimately the novel is not groping with random scenarios. It works as systematically as the human body, a cohesive theme in the book. It is the operation of hyperglossia what ultimately makes sense of this constant unfolding of signifiers in an experience similar to this one: "What you do is get under the covers and turn on the TV— volume down, let it grumble, flicker, whine. You hold the remote out like a weapon, and you take shots at the very center of the screen. Each shot kills one channel, but then another follows directly on its heels as the notion of channel surfing with a TV remote control" (99).

A metaphor cocoons within the familiarity of the act. While the narrator is busy "killing" channels, one must be aware that there are other realities isolated by the other channels she is not watching. It is a hyperglossic operation where, as in Borges' Aleph, all realities flow simultaneously and escape the capacity of language to mediate those realities. Hyperglossia, therefore, develops in smooth space. It is not about the narrative voices but about the narratives themselves.

What I am presenting here is not just a renaming of a non-linear narrative structure which has no beginning or end; it is about a series of conceptual links that lead the narrative (as followed by an alert reader) to other conceptual links, growing and moving through hyperglossia in artistic ways. Indeed, hyperglossia is based on qualia: the voiceness of voice and the narrativeness of narratives. It is perceptual and subjective, because it requires the reader "to know," to be aware and recognize the operations that might or might not be obvious to the reader.

Hyperglossia is not discreet; as in Bakhtin's polyphony, it conveys an aural condition of the text. In hyperglossia, all is language that meshes rhizomatic narratives. Deleuze and Guattari explain the concept of rhizome:

> A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. (7)

Therefore, 'rhizome' in hyperglossia means that a narrative structure is exponential and posits an indefinite chain of signifiers that become not only a metaphor of how the *homo technologicus* thinks, but also of how we construct reality in the twenty-first century. As it breaks down our ways of understanding and experiencing the text, hyperglossia in *Flights* is propelled by textual assemblage, an increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections (Deleuze and Guattari 8). Tokarczuk's text assumes that, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also, lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification, which, corresponding with Deleuze and Guattari: "[P]roduce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity—but we don't know yet what the multiple entails" (4).

The philosophers contend that all we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure (4). At this point, it is clear that assemblage in *Flights* transcends the linear, bounded and fixed qualities of the traditional reading. As a bound book, its form might appear static, but its hyperglossic capacities unleash possibilities that challenge the traditional ways of the novel and the way we read them. More specifically, what Olga Tokarczuk ultimately achieves is a reenactment of what she envisions as a constellation and ends up calling a "cabinet of curiosities." Indeed, Tokarczuk's narrative cosmos is assembled as such, which she articulates thus: "[T]he mind is so occupied with its own act, a play staged by the self for the self in a hasty, makeshift cabinet of curiosities peopled by author and character, narrator and reader, the person describing and the person being described, that feet, shoes, heels, and faces become, sooner or later, mere components of that act" (13).

The passage—more specifically, the phrase "cabinet of curiosities"—functions as a hyperlink to another section titled "Cabinet of Curiosities," where the narrator states that: "I've never been a big fan of art museums, which I would happily exchange for cabinets of curiosities, where collections are comprised of the rare, the unique, the bizarre, the freakish. The things that exist in the shadows of consciousness, and that, when you do take a look, dart out of your field of vision" (17).

There is, indeed, a method in the madness. Unlike the static form of the book, a hypertext can be composed and decoded non-sequentially; it is a variable structure, composed of blocks of text and the electronic links that join them. George Landow specifies that hypertext: "[d]enotes text composed of blocks of text, what Barthes terms a lexia—and the electronic links that join them… [it] links one passage of verbal discourse to images, maps, diagrams, and sound as easily as to another verbal passage, expands the notion of text beyond the solely verbal" (3).

Hypertext, an information technology consisting of individual blocks of text, or lexias (as Roland Barthes tagged them), denotes an information medium that links verbal and nonverbal information. What bridges the verbal and nonverbal also links what is enounced with the chain of signifiers not present in the

text but invoked in the discourse. Therefore, what makes hypertext work in Flights is not the mechanical architectural operation, but its hyperglossia. Landow comments that "the very idea of hypertextuality, like poststructuralism, grows out of dissatisfaction with the related phenomena of the printed book and hierarchical thought" (1). Hyperglossia overcomes this. It is a dispositive of enunciation.

Tokarczuk manages, in the end, to unite a series of tales that shape the novel into a cabinet of curiosities, that eccentric ancestor of what later became known as a museum where to have a central plot, it would be the sum of its parts and its motley array of stories. She describes the book as a constellation novel, in reference to its complex, nonlinear structure. To put it Bhaktin's language: "The whole of the novel and the specific tasks involved in constructing this whole out of heteroglot, multivoiced, multi-styled and often multi-languaged elements remain outside the boundaries of such a study. In the majority of cases the style of the novel is subsumed under the concept of 'epic style'" ("Discourse in the Novel" 265). Here, the novel divorces from epic.

The Novel as "Poetics of Relation"

When the narrator in *Flights* says: "only what is different will survive" ("Cabinet of Curiosities" 18), she seems to hail that which becomes the Other, which includes those "freaks of nature that are owed immortality" in the Western world and with whom she identifies. Difference is opaque, not transparent, where transparency, as in Byung Chul Han's concept, is normalcy, sameness, stability, and the root. In *The Expulsion of the Other*, as Srinivas Lankala has contended, Han:

> aligns this expulsion of the Other with the repression of migrants, refugees, and other dejected minorities who jeopardize the idea of a universal sameness. He sees the centralized surveillance regimes represented by the old Panopticon now replaced by an exclusionary "banopticon" (12), that operates through the violent enforcements of closed borders and the prevention of the Other from entering the territory of the Self. (117)

What is transparent cannot be seen. It equates in silence: "I've become invisible, see-through. I am able to move around like a ghost, look over people's shoulders, listen in on their arguments and watch them sleep with their heads on their backpacks or talking to themselves, unaware of my presence, moving just their lips, forming words that I will soon pronounce for them" (19). The antinomy enclosed in the quoted passage is that those who stand out in difference are the ones who become unseen; those who repeat themselves in others become visible. Therefore, the narrator in *Flights* becomes visible by opposing transparency with her skeptical, nomadic, and rootless movement.

In *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant proposes the concept of opacity to juxtapose the idea of transparency. He says:

> Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing. (111)

Glissant conceives errantry as a poetics. Errantry suggests what the Martinican philosopher calls "poetics of relation," a concept I will borrow from his homonymous book to describe how hyperglossia activates narratives and discourses within *Flights*. "Mobility is reality," the narrator says at some point (226). A tale of errantry, Glissant says, is the tale of relation (18). Indeed, a poetics of relations is rhizomatic because, as he states: "The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that

of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the *Poetics of Relation*, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (1).

A poetics of relation is how hyperglossia works: a systemic network of lexemes unleashed through endless layers of meaning that multiply and create a vast polysemic webbing of objective and affective meanings. At this point, it should be more than obvious that the driving forces in Tokarczuk's narrative scheme are those progressions and sequences that make up her rhizomatic storytelling. The rhizome, through hyperglossia, then drives the text into hypertextual realm. Additionally, the hypertextual character of the novel highlights the calculated repetition of concepts, themes, phrases, and words that point to other contexts applied to those themes, phrases, and words that are present within the text. Such is the ecology of the novel. For instance, the phrase "Seeing is Knowing" is the title of the sixth section or vignette (19). The phrase is echoed in "The Achilles Tendon" on page 182 ("Seeing, after all, means knowing"; in "Letter to the Amputated Leg," on page 209 ("…because it is said: seeing is knowing"); and in "Final Timetable," on page 399 ("Seeing is knowing, we had no doubt about that"). These repetitions work as mock hyperlinks between sections in an attempt to provide a principle of formal unity to the text.

Similarly, there are more than 200 references to the body, a ratio of one mention every two pages, approximately, dispersed in 116 vignettes, out of which 111 are composed around the idea of a shattered body as they delve into topics such as the nature of existence, religion, time, or immortality, all as perceived through the body (the five initial vignettes present the narrator's mental state that postulates writing as salvation, the fabric of breath, or a way of staying sane). Amid this conscious effort for unity, Tokarczuk's novel is a severed body that needs to be conjoined through language. As a matter of fact, *Flights* is built around the persistence of body preservations (200) and the idea of consequent immortality.

In "The Bodhi Tree," the narrator meets a man who works for a company that makes "quite complicated electronic devices allowing blood to be conserved longer-term and allowing organs to be safely transported" (168). In "The Achilles Tendon," the Flemish surgeon and anatomist Philip Verheyen receives a visit from Willem Van Holssen, one of his students, and who "unintentionally walks up to the printed sheets of paper—all of them show muscles and blood vessels, tendons and nerves" (182). Later on, Van Holssen himself will appear as speaker in "The History of Philip Verheyen, Written by his Student and Confidant Willem Van Horssen," where he provides an account of his mentor's severed leg, "this scrap of the human body" that now lived "its own life as a specimen" (194). Verheyen will eventually affirm: "The body is something absolutely mysterious" (209).

The novel predicates on the structural, and as a body without organs, Van Holsen resumes: "Of course the dead body is not alive; what I mean is more the fact of it remaining in its form. Form is in its way alive" (202).

These are bodies without organs, literally and metaphorically. On the literal level, the novel echoes the notions of taxidermy, anatomy, autopsies, mummification and other forms of retracing the geography of the body from the inside and the outside; but on the figurative level, the concept echoes Deleuze and Guattari:

> A body without organs is not an empty body stripped of organs, but a body upon which that which serves as organs (wolves, wolf eyes, wolf jaws?) is distributed according to crowd phenomena, in Brownian motion, in the form of molecular multiplicities. The desert is populous. Thus, the body without organs is opposed less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism. The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization. Lice hopping on the beach. Skin colonies. The full body without organs is a body populated by multiplicities. (30)

The "Body without Organs," a term Deleuze and Guattari borrowed from poet Antonin Artaud, consists o an assemblage or body with no underlying organizational principles, and hence no organs within it. It conveys the notion that it is a body but not an organism. In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari define the term:

> You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this BwO?—But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic; desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love... The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them. (150)

Body without Organs stands as a philosophical concept and is played out as a "plane of consistency, which, concretely ties together heterogeneous or disparate elements" (Deleuze and Guattari 507). It is also a metaphor that refers to bodies located outside the norm, and that all that is learned could indeed melt in the air. In other words, a body without organs moves through smooth space. Similarly, Olga Tokarcsuk's novel drifts into the wide open with the spirit of a Kerouac's *On the Road.*

The body is severed across the pages of the book as the narrator of *Flights*, who remains unnamed, feels imprisoned in her life and, ironically, when she finds herself shrouded in the darkness of the night, she begins to find herself. The night locks her up. A hoarding body encrypts the limits of her world: "The body is something absolutely mysterious" (209). The body references are spread all over pages, like "[s]kulls with growths of all conceivable structures" (20), or "embryos which you can barely see at all… like little fish" (21), images that metaphorize the nature of the novel itself. The whole novel is a body one finds and must recompose.

As Philip Verheyen addresses his own amputated leg, "as though talking to a living, independent person," Van Horsen says:

> Separated from him, it took on some sort of demonic autonomy, simultaneously maintaining with him a painful relationship. I also confess that these are the most unsettling portions of his letters. But at the same time, I have no doubt that this is just a metaphor, a kind of mental shortcut. He was thinking that what once formed a whole but was then broken down into parts is still powerfully connected, in an invisible way that is difficult to investigate. (210)

This passage resonates with the novel's architecture as the creative principle or poetics in Flights. What connects the novel in an invisible way is, precisely, hyperglossia.

Conclusions

The characters of Tokarczuk, in their constant journey, embrace movement as they seek a life free of obstacles, be they mental, physical, or spiritual. The novel, therefore, emphasizes the nomad body, the stateless individual who is constantly reinventing their identity as displaced figures or opaque bodies. Sean Garper Bye says that, "[i]t is a search that leads *Flights'* characters and its narrator into an endless, restless probing of humankind's external and interior worlds, rejecting the Cartesian division between body and soul" (65). The polarization of binary opposites tenses in the novel through the deliberate fragmentary structure of the novel, the juxtaposition of its parts, and the consequential hyperglossic effect: the narrative's centripetal and centrifugal impulses, at force with each other, magnify the reaches of meaning

through hypertextual relations that synthesize Tokarczuk's work as a bricoleur and as an engineer, to lend Levi-Strauss terms for the construction of narratives.

It is clear that in *Flights* the constituent parts are not necessarily subservient to the whole, but that, in fact, the parts do expand their meaning in relation to the whole. The semantic mapping and structural scaffolding of Tokarckzuk's novel create a particular granularity in the text which exceeds its own limits, yielding to multiple reading paths that reflect the way we construct knowledge in the Internet era: rhizomatically. In conclusion, hyperglossia ends up as a destabilized system the pulses organically toward moving meanings. Hyperglossia in *Flights* is rhizomatic, hypertextual, and exponential. It is a continuum of fluidity and indeterminacy that challenges Western patterns of reading and thought since, as identities evolve from their self-containment, and as cultural fencing vanishes, the world becomes a hypertext, borrowing Ted Nelson's phrase, more "deeply intertwingled" (45), providing a non-linear, non-hierarchical structure that leans toward the way we construct our reality in present day, hypermediated society. Hyperglossia has turned into a facsimile of the way we think and experience life. Such is the truth in these delectable antinomies.

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A "Present-Tense People": (Re-) Writing the Native in Tommy Orange's *There There*

Abstract: *There There*, Cheyenne and Arapaho writer Tommy Orange's first novel, has been praised as "an astonishing literary debut" (Margaret Atwood), a "tense, prismatic book" (*New York Times*), a "breathtaking, haunting and gripping story" (*Publishers Weekly*), and has received multiple literary awards since its publication in 2018. This article explores Tommy Orange's way of writing the Indian (back) into presence, in response to a "metaphorical," as well as very "material" (Arif Dirlik) deletion of the "inconvenient Indian" (Thomas King) along centuries of American history. The discussion focuses on Tommy Orange's understanding of storytelling as a way of continuing "Indian Wars" (E. Cook-Lynn) with the pen. Storytelling is a revisionist act in that it implicitly denies the stereotype of the vanishing race and re-places the Indigenous American not in a(n impossible) pre-colonial past, but in the land with which the Native has never ceased to remain connected. The characters' stories, some in an autobiographical tone, others in the third person, narrate the Natives as "a present-tense people" (TT 141), grappling with a traumatic, far-from-romanticized past and present, but all the more alive for that.

Keywords: Indian, Native American Renaissance, storytelling, transhistorical trauma, presence, "survivance"

Introduction

In an interview for *The Guardian*, Tommy Orange declares to Hannah Beckerman that "[t]here's a monolithic version of what a Native is supposed to be." He finds that "there aren't many representations of us [Indigenous people] as modern, contemporary and living in cities." A young man, a mixed-blood, an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, one who ironically identifies himself as "technically three sixty-fourths short of a half" in light of the federal legal definition of Nativeness by blood quantum policies (Orange, "How Native American is Native American Enough?"), and an urban Indian with a life experience similar to that of so many contemporary Native Americans, Tommy Orange feels that "[w]riting a polyphonic, multigenerational novel is resisting this one idea of what being Native is supposed to look like. If we all have to be historical, with a headdress, looking off into the distance, that's hopeless as far as building a proper, complex, human identity" (Interview with Hannah Beckerman).

There There, the writer's debut novel, which has received multiple literary awards since its publication in 2018, and has been praised as a "tense, prismatic book" (Janet Maslin, *New York Times*), "breathtaking, haunting and gripping" (*Publishers Weekly*) and "an instant classic" (Katy Dodge), tells the story of being Native as being ravaged by a painful past and yet able to look into a hopeful future. Between these two, there is making sense of a disorienting present, oftentimes traumatic in multiple ways, but open to the possibility of moving on.

"Sending a Voice" into the Past and Future

Set in Oakland, California, *There There* is composed of the stories of twelve characters, some full-blood Natives, others mixed-bloods, all urban Indians struggling with painful experiences and troubled identities; their journeys intersect at the Big Oakland Powwow. When a shooting occurs, by a group of Indians involved in drug dealing, whose plan is to rob the powwow of the money for prizes, the sense of community comes heavily into question. It is the urban Native community of Oakland and, by extension,

of contemporary America, that Tommy Orange writes into existence, that is, out of absence. Ignored or stereotyped, Natives have been "turned into a one-dimensional people, a one-dimensional thing; we're a statistic or we're a historical image"; to "humanize" his characters, Orange has them "experience things that are a part of our communities" (interview with Marlena Gates of *Electric Lit*). [28] In so doing, Tommy Orange places himself into the tradition of the Native American Renaissance. Kenneth Lincoln, the critic who named the Native literary movement born in 1969, thought that the act of "sending a voice" was one concept of the utmost importance about the Native Renaissance; it meant "tracing the connective threads between the cultural past and its expression in the present" (2). While the way the connection is made varies with different generations of writers, what seems to remain unchanged is, in Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's formulation, "a sacred responsibility to write [and to] grasp with a sense of mission the clear knowledge of the crimes suffered by indigenous peoples in a colonized world, to listen, and to participate […] in the intellectual life that emerges" (*New Indians, Old Wars* 1). To do so is—using Cook-Lynn's vocabulary once again—for "new Indians" to continue "old wars," where being at war means the Native's rejection of compatibility with emplacing definitions and stereotypical binaries, an erasure that manifests "not [only] in a 'metaphorical' but in a very material sense" (Dirlik 80).

The Prologue to Tommy Orange's novel is an act of "sending a voice." The arch-image he uses to represent the traumatic condition of being an Indian in post-Columbian America is the "Indian head" (TT 3). A test pattern used by American TV stations all over the country for several decades before the advent of color TV, it showed the portrait of an Indian chief in full ceremonial headdress: "There was what looked like a bull's eye in the middle of the screen, with numbers like coordinates. The Indian's head was just above the bull's eye, like all you'd need to do was nod up in agreement to set the sights on the target" (TT 4).

In an article on the history of the Indian head test pattern, Pete Fasciano explains that "the engineers needed something subjective, but objective, […] familiar, but exotic" (4), immediately recognizable; the figure of the Indian met all these requirements. In Orange's rendering, the Indian head is a key trope of a whole history of Indian-white relations.[29] Defined as a savage, whether brutish or "noble," aligned with the wild landscape to be tamed and ordered with a sense of mission, objectified and denied a voice along

[28] Marlena Gates emphasizes the relevance of Tommy Orange's literary endeavor in response to the Native being largely ignored, a reality of the past in the mainstream imaginary, with a comment about the everyday experience of an Indigenous person; while the detail seems benign or irrelevant, it is telling enough: in the restaurant downtown Santa Fe, New Mexico where she and Tommy Orange met for the interview, they were "the only two non-white people in the place, the only Indians. We were put in a dark corner and ignored by our waitress […]. A rush of stories ran through my head I had heard from IAIA peers and faculty about Indians being treated inhumanely in Santa Fe by the starkly white bourgeoisie, even as our art sells to these people for thousands upon thousands of dollars throughout their downtown boutiques. The irony of colonialist art appropriation practices never lost on us." Their solution is to ignore the fact of being ignored, which becomes an act of affirming presence: "During the interview, though, Tommy and I pretended not to see the obvious—that we were the hidden Indians in the room, ignored against an all-white space—so used to being treated as the ghosts we have been. Instead, we focused on our work to be done, as always."

[29] Fasciano's article calls the Indian Head Test Pattern "an icon of engineering in the early American television industry"; while this may very well be true from a technical point of view, the choice itself, motivated by the "needed consistency and familiarity" (4) the portrait provided, speaks of the Indian Head as an "icon" of mainstream attitude toward the Native: like—according to Fasciano's explanation—"all the geometry of the chart is defined by math," the blood quantum policing of Native identity is also governed by math, so much so that—

"[…] in this American city with all its people,
I am Native American—less than one, less than
whole—I am less than myself. Only a fraction […]." (Natalie Diaz, "American Arithmetic" 98)

a history of conflict, removal, and assimilation, the Indian became a test pattern for achieving an American indigeneity through the erasure of the Native.[30] The Prologue revisits some significant moments of the post-contact history of America, from King Philip's War to the Sand Creek massacre, reading them under the recurrent sign of the Indian heads rolling, again and again, off dismembered Indian bodies: "The Indian head in the jar, the Indian head on a spike were like flags flown, to be seen, cast broadly" (TT 5). By the same token, Orange interprets Thanksgiving as a celebration of a series of "successful massacres" (TT 5). His sharp images are painted with a brush that reminds of Thomas King's, the author of The Inconvenient Indian ("inconvenient" because the Native's very presence questions the settler's constructed "indigeneity"); says King:

> When we imagine history, we imagine a grand structure, a national chronicle, a closely organized and guarded record of agreed-upon events and interpretations, a bundle of "authenticities" and "truths" welded into a flexible, yet conservative narrative that explains how we got from there to here. It is a relationship we have with ourselves, a love affair we celebrate with flags and anthems, festivals and guns. (Ch. "One. Forget Columbus," page not numbered in the electronic version)

The Indian head, a flag flown with pride, "cast broadly," in its test pattern form "was broadcast to sleeping Americans" overnight on TV, "as we set sail from our living rooms, over the ocean blue-green glowing airwaves, to the shores, the screens of the New World" (TT 5). Resonating with Vizenor, who thought of Manifest Destiny in terms of the "manifest manners of domination" (4), Orange views the Indian head as a token of the American Dream, with the underlying suggestion that the glorious story of building the nation is a way of looking at its own history with the eyes shut.[31]

"Sending a voice" is not just about the past. It entails "*re*writing" and "*re*righting" the Native's "position in history" (Tuhiwai Smith 28) as a decolonizing project, and it is about offering an interpretation of history from an Indigenous perspective, as well as giving a continuation, and certainly not an end, to the story. While the Indian Termination policy "was and is exactly what it sounds like" (TT 9), its unexpected result was that "we made way for our people to go back and forth between reservation and city. We did not move to cities to die" (TT 9). To send a voice back, to reconnect with a tradition that has historically

[30] Jace Weaver's comment on the matter of settler societies attempting to achieve indigeneity through a "metaphorical" as well as "material" deletion of the Native is, I believe, quite relevant for the discussion at this point: "The declaration of indigenous cultures as vanishing or extinct becomes a means in settler colonies of establishing an uneasy illusion of indigeneity (indigenousness) on the part of the colonizers" (228). The uneasiness he talks about resonates with Bhabha's conceptualization of the mechanism of the stereotype, with its "dependence on […] 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness," which nevertheless needs to be "anxiously repeated" (94-95).

[31] Oneida scholar Richard Wheelock discusses the contradiction embedded in the construction of the American self-narrative: while myth as a "narrative of a people's sacred history, telling of their purpose and destiny and providing a model for a way of living" is treated, in Western culture in general and in America in particular, as a "fanciful […] conception of the world" and, consequently, not credited as history, "the fact remains that even today, a heroic narrative of epic proportions does guide the perception of the American public and frequently colors public policy" (105-106). Ignoring this tension between pretended objectivity and actual subjectivity in shaping this heroic story, American history has (at least until recently) promoted a mythic timeline connecting Columbus's "discovery" to the American Revolution, the westward expansion and the exploration of cosmic space under the sign of a sense of mission (111). Within this story, which "often obscures as much as it reveals" (114), the roles reserved to the Indian are the well-known stereotypes of the hostile "antagonist, an enemy for the people to overcome on the way to their destiny" (115) and the Noble Savage; this persistence of the dual representation of the Native—what Robert Berkhofer called, in his eponymous book, "the white man's Indian"—speaks of the "fixity" Bhabha identified "in the ideological construction of otherness" (94).

been under constant attack, means to place movement—forced or willingly accepted for reasons that had/ have to do with survival—under the sign of (re)-emergence. To say that the Native American has a special relationship with land has become yet another stereotype, even when it designates a reality rooted in the tribal traditions that the Native Renaissance sought to pull back together in literary space. Tommy Orange reinterprets the land connection from a perspective that sees urbanity as part of a continuum: "We've been moving for a long time, but the land moves with you like memory. An Urban Indian belongs to the city, and cities belong to the earth. Everything here is formed in relation to every other living and nonliving thing from the earth. All our relations" (TT 11).

Even though "[w]e came to know the downtown Oakland skyline better than we did any sacred mountain range" (TT 11), the departure from the reservation, which was at the same time a home and "an act of war" (Sherman Alexie, interview with Joe Fassler—*The Atlantic*), was not a disconnection of the Indian from the land, since "everything comes from something that came before"; "[t]he land is everywhere or nowhere" (TT 11).

Tommy Orange most explicitly aligns himself with the politics of the Native American Renaissance through the act of telling a story which, ultimately, means "sending a voice" forward: "what we are is what our ancestors did. How they survived. We are the memories we don't remember" (TT 10).

According to Lee Francis, "the People learned about their harmonious place in the order of all creation by listening to and telling story"; with the disruption caused by what Lawrence Gross called th "postapocalypse stress syndrome" (33) of colonization and its aftermath, the oral tradition changed, it started to include stories about "smallpox and greed. […] About the massacres […]" (Francis 77, 78). One of Orange's characters, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, remembers an imaginary dialogue she had with her teddy bear when she was a child:

> You gotta know about the history of your people. How you got to be here, that's all based on what people done to get you here. Us bears, you Indians, we been through a lot. They tried to kill us. But then when you hear them tell it, they make history seem like one big heroic adventure across an empty forest. There were bears and Indians all over the place. Sister, they slit all our throats. (TT 51)

The toy's words actually echo Opal's mother's pronouncement on the right way to connect with ancestors and honor them: "Opal, you have to know that we should never not tell our stories, and that no one is too young to hear" (TT 57). It is significant that Tommy Orange places this episode during the occupation of the Alcatraz Island (and the prison there) from 1969 to 1971. The occupation was planned and coordinated by a group of Indigenous activists, who called themselves Indians of All Tribes. The American Indian self-determination movement, the activist counterpart of the Native American (literary) Renaissance, had to do with "imagin[ing] a collective future free of […] government control" (Teuton 2), so much so as the Native Renaissance was about re-imagining Indianness. Two sides of the Red Power Movement, these were the political and intellectual offspring of the termination and relocation policies of the 1950s, which were intended to dissolve the tribal connection and produce the complete assimilation of Natives within the industrial economy of the country, but caused a displacement ultimately resulting in a "young, urban, and intertribal" (Teuton 2) form of Native existence. It was yet another form of (re-)emergence of the Native, which "helped create a sense of tribalism"; it drew upon the common traumatic history and was "[a]daptation, not accommodation" (Deloria xiv). "We are what we imagine," the prominent Native American Renaissance writer N. Scott Momaday (167) said; Red Power had to do with "improvisation" in restoring connection with tradition through intertribal powwows, and with the understanding of "Indian" no longer as a colonial misnomer, but as a pan-tribal identification which signified "survivance"—Gerald Vizenor's famous hybrid term for survival and presence. In *There There*, Jacquie Red Feather—Opal's sister—suggests the role of imagination in "survivance" when she remembers that "a small group of

Indians first took over Alcatraz, just five or six of them, took it over as a piece of performance art five years before it really happened" (TT 279). She refers to what newspapers called "the invasion" of Alcatraz by a group of Sioux, who "laid claim to the island under the Sioux treaty of 1868" (Johnson 50) since it had been abandoned and become "surplus land"; the occupation, which lasted only a few hours, included the performance of a victory dance.

Writing the Natives out of Absence

Tommy Orange seems to suggest that stories of continuation have to do with living as the art of reemerging. Dene Oxendene, a mixed-blood character who gets a cultural grant to record stories of ordinary Natives living in contemporary Oakland, justifies his project: "Because all we got right now are reservation stories and shitty versions from outdated history textbooks. A lot of us live in cities now. This is supposed to be like a way to start telling this other story" (TT 149).

He conducts his project "with no direction or manipulation or agenda" (TT 40), which is Orange's way of suggesting that simply exposing a glorious story as a genocidal one is not sufficient and risks reducing the Indian to the same absence into which the mainstream story placed the Native. The "other story," o the Other's story to be told by contemporary Native writers, must be one of "contemporary survivors, as Louise Erdrich once said ("Where I Ought to Be"), in the sense that it must connect the threads across the gaps that are necessarily a part of it. Or, as Tony Loneman reflects, "a hole in a sock gives the soc character" (TT 18).

Orange's characters experience absence in multiple ways—as loss of, or separation from family marginalization, or the lack of a sense of identity. Tony Loneman suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome due to his mother's heavy drinking during pregnancy; he calls it "the Drome," which is suggestive of his familiarity with his disability, which practically renders him invisible to people who try not to star rudely at his face, thus ignoring the connection between his medical condition and his Indianness a fundamentally having to do with pain, inherited as well as personal. Now, in his adulthood, Tony' mother is in jail and his father does not know that he even exists. "Maybe I am a ghost" (TT 19)—this I his sense of identity, and it drives his choice of going into drug dealing, another form of social absence.

In his childhood, Dene Oxendene loses his uncle to drinking and after the man fades into absence the loss of this close relative, a father figure, makes him automatically translate the group of letters "emt"—which he accidentally sees somewhere—as "empty" (TT 28). Later on, when he applies for a grant to conduct the storytelling project, originally his uncle's idea, a form of Native restitution akin to Momaday's act of imagination, he meets Rob, one of the "white hipsters everywhere trying to come off as confident" (37), whose remark about West Oakland threatens to send Dene reeling back into Indian absence. Rob I seeking a place in West Oakland because "it's dirt cheap out there"; he comments—"I mean, no one's really from there, right?" and then, self-confidently—"There is no there there" (TT 37-38). To Dene, born and grown in West Oakland, that sounds like a denial of home for the Native yet again; Rob's use of the quote is self-serving, as is the non-Native interpretation of New World history: "He [Rob] hadn't read Gertrude Stein beyond the quote. But for Native people in this country, all over the Americas, it's been developed over, buried ancestral land, glass and concrete and wire and steel, unreturnable memory. There is no there there" (TT 38).

Opal and Jacquie live under the terror of eviction notices and regular loss of home; they also lose their mother to cancer because the woman cannot cover the cost of treatment. Opal remembers her mom getting "smaller and smaller" (59), fading away. The girls even lose each other "into the system" (TT 167) when Jacquie gets arrested and Opal becomes an institutionalized orphan after they leave Ronald's house; the man is their mother's boyfriend, and he tries to sexually abuse Jacquie, another form of deleting the (Native) woman through denial of personhood.

Edwin Black, a mixed-blood with a white mother and an unknown Native father, earns his MA with a thesis on the influence of the blood quantum policies on modern Native identity, without even knowing his father's tribe—he writes a thesis about an absence (TT 71-2). His father materializes out of nowhere in response to Edwin's message on his mother's Facebook page, and that is how the young man finds out he is half Cheyenne, but he is still troubled with not knowing how to be one and resorts to stereotype—"I am a Cheyenne Indian. A warrior. […] I get mad at that thought, that I even thought it" (TT 77). Edwin goes through a crisis of shrinking into non-being—"I feel as if I am going through withdrawal," dealing with "real life absence" (TT 62, 63). His way of coping is eating as a way of nourishing his sense of being alive; while he becomes overweight, his sense of social diminishment consumes him—he exists only virtually, through his presence on social media, and remains emplaced in a room that seems to swallow him.

Jacquie has a history of drinking and is recently sober. A substance abuse counselor, she travels to a conference where she meets Harvey, the father of the daughter she abandoned because she could not raise her without a stable home. She fights the memory of her second daughter's committing suicide; the boys of this daughter, her grandsons, "had all begun life in withdrawal" (TT 120), since they lose their mother so early they barely remember her. Opal adopts and raises them, but refuses to teach them what it means to be Native. This is her way to avoid transmitting pain along with culture, passing on the trauma of being Indian. Orvil, one of the boys, learns to "dance Indian" from YouTube footage of powwows. Orvil experiences a crisis of authenticity as he realizes that the Indianness he craves for is already inscribed with what Wendy Rose calls "whiteshamanism"[32] (403): "It's important that he dress like an Indian, dance like an Indian, even if it is an act, even if he feels like a fraud the whole time, because the only way to be Indian in this world is to look and act like an Indian. To be or not to be Indian depends on it" (TT 121-122).

Blue, Jacquie's abandoned daughter, experiences a dysfunctional marriage and domestic violence; in leaving her husband, she leaves behind her medicine box made by her Indian father-in-law. This is another departure from the traditional, yet the connection remains, as it were, since the memory of that box stays with her. Other characters, the Gomez and Gonzales cousins, lose family members to drinking and driving and to violence between drug dealing gangs.

Instead of a Conclusion

Along the lines of all these individual stories, Tommy Orange narrates what Nancy Van Styvendal calls "transhistorical" trauma. Van Styvendale argues that defining trauma as just an event outside the norm runs the risk of ignoring the fact that the traumatic is actually the norm for the American Indian Native authors such as Eduardo Duran, Bonnie Duran, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Susan Yello Horse-Davis, as well as Lisa Poupart and Lemyra DeBruyn, have worked with the concepts of "soul wound" and "disenfranchised grief." They have shown that the historical stereotyping of the Indians a "savages," deficient in their very humanity, as well as the act of ignoring them by viewing them a people ultimately destined to vanish out of history due to their so-called inability to progress, have denied them the possibility to mourn for their loss in the colonial encounter. The effect of the "historical unresolved grief" (Brave Heart and DeBruyn) has been the internalization of oppression—the "colonization of the mind," as

[32] According to Wendy Rose, "Whiteshamanism" is the "appropriation and denial" (408) of Indianness through the construction of Native authenticity in accordance to the ingrained stereotype. In her view, "white shamans"—who are not necessarily "Americans, […] nor even white" (404)—are those people who promote a fake Nativeness, made of elements which have come to be seen as "Indian"; they "don a bastardized composite of pseudo-Indian 'style' buckskins, beadwork, headbands, moccasins, and sometimes paper masks intended to portray native spiritual beings such as Coyote or Raven" (405). Indigenous authenticity is, then, judged based on such misplaced and misunderstood cultural markers.

Gloria Bird calls it. The repressed—or suppressed—pain and anger have transmuted into violence against themselves and others, as ways of coping. In *There There*, alcoholism is referenced at every step; in one of the characters' definitions, it is a "cheap, legal, and available" medicine "against the disease that life [as a Native] is" (TT 112). Suicide as violence against oneself and a way of (no longer) dealing with an impossible life made of absences is described as "staggering" (TT 98); Jacquie participates in a conference themed *Keeping Them from Harm*, which is about finding ways to reduce the suicide rate among Native young people. She realizes "you can't sell life is okay when it's not" (TT 98); afflicted with alcoholism for a long period of time, Jacquie knows she had "been thinking of burning her life down" (TT 152) every day. The powwow robbers are young Indian drug dealers. They shoot and kill fellow community members. Unbelievable as it may sound to see Indians rob a powwow, it is also an effect of transhistorical trauma. Their violence, on the surface driven by the prospect of making big money, is actually motivated by the internalized colonial binary of successful versus vanishing, and they want to align with the former. To think of them simply as the bad guys runs the risk of bringing to life the known dual stereotype of the good Indian/ bad Indian yet again. Significantly, when Opal hears the shooting, she "wonders, she has the thought, *Did someone really come to get us here? Now?* She doesn't know what she means" (TT278). But she clearly references the possibility of another "successful massacre." And, in a way, it is, since it is the effect of "termination" in the sense of dismantling the tribal sense of community.

The powwow, a phenomenon born in what Mary Louise Pratt called a "contact zone"[33] (1), a means of Native resistance to cultural annihilation, is represented in *There There* in similar tones: "We made powwows because we needed a place to be together" (TT 135), restore a sense of presence; as for blood, "[w]e are full blood, half breed, quadroon, eighths, sixteenths, thirty-seconds. Undoable math" (TT 136)—a response to the disempowering blood quantum policies.[34] Significantly, the final section of the novel is titled "Return." While some of the people die, others remain to continue the story of Native presence. Tony Loneman, the young man with the fetal alcohol syndrome, who used to view himself as a ghost, lost in marginalization, is initially on the side of the robbers. He regains his existence as he kills some of them and saves innocent lives. He is seriously injured, and we never know whether he survives or not, but as he lies in the grass, birds singing in "the middle of the middle of him [,] [t]he center's center," we know that "Tony isn't going anywhere" (TT 290). And we know, like Vonnegut knew, that there is bird singing in the post-apocalypse.

[33] Pratt uses the term "to refer to the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (8).

[34] Even though such policies continue to interfere with Native self-determination and take a heavy toll on Indigenous communities, the blood quantum is not, traditionally, a criterion of belonging. Monacan poet Karenne Wood's "My Standard Response" expresses that beautifully:

"As they ask, they think, yes,
I can see it in her face. High cheekbones
(whatever those are) *and dark hair.*
Here's a thought: don't we all have
high cheekbones? If we didn't,
our faces would cave in.
(But I do have a colonized nose).
I'm sick of explaining myself.
"You know," I finally say,
"It doesn't matter to my people." (231-2)

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Decolonizing the 'French as a Foreign Language' University Curriculum through Literature, Interpretation from a South(ern) African Perspective

Abstract: In this article, the authors examine the decolonization of the FLE (French as a Foreign Language) curriculum in South Africa. More specifically, they concentrate on how literature in the French language has been taught and what transformations can be introduced in order to meet student demands—in 2015 students from the University of Cape Town (South Africa) demonstrated against the colonial spirit which, according to them, still reigned on their campus and in South African universities. Their protest, Rhodes must fall, quickly led to a national movement inspiring students across South Africa to insist on the decolonization of all universities (Knudsen et al. 2019 and Ahmed 2019). A survey (questionnaire and interviews) conducted in 2020 among 10 South African universities sheds light on how to address the decolonization of the FLE curriculum in South Africa. The results provide possible approaches to establishing a decolonized curriculum as well as works and themes to be studied in the literature component. Decolonizing the curriculum is interpreted in two different ways: some stakeholders have a rather extreme view wanting to remove all information originating from Europe and the West from the program. Others feel that content from the West can no longer be at the center of the curriculum, but should not be left out completely (Luckett et al. 2019; Senekal and Lenz 2020).

Keywords: decolonization, curriculum, literature teaching, French as a Foreign Language (Francais Langue Etrangere or FLE), South Africa.

Introduction

According to Demeuse and Strauven (2013), it is of the utmost importance to keep in mind the societal political project that one wants to promote and students' educational needs when conceptualizing a curriculum. In 2015, students at the University of Cape Town (South Africa) protested against the colonial spirit that they believed still reigned on their campus and in South African universities. Their protest, Rhodes must fall, quickly turned into a national movement inspiring students from across South Africa to call for the decolonization of the curriculum at university level (Knudsen et al. 2019; Ahmed 2019; Rodrigues 2020). The movement showed how the current curriculum disregarded South Africa's societal project and also ignored the educational needs of students. These events did not go unnoticed in the media and the academic community (Mavunga 2019; Ayodeji-Falade and Osunkunle 2019).

The question about what decolonizing the curriculum entails sparked debates all over. Opinions on decolonization differ: some educational stakeholders have a rather extreme view wanting to remove all information coming from Europe and the West. Others feel that content from the West can no longer be at the center of the curriculum, but should not be completely banished (Luckett et al. 2019; Senekal and Lenz 2020). Adopting the first interpretation to abolish all knowledge of the West from the program poses real difficulties for the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) curriculum. Normally, there is a grammar and a

literature component in FLE university programs and it is the literature part that interests us, in particular for its potential to advance the socio-political project of a society.

Songossaye (2018) explains that literature is capable of driving societal development. It can also have a guiding impact on human capital development as well as on values such as openness, self-awareness and common group values. Furthermore, literature is used to read and understand society according to Riolfi and Vandeyar (2020). However, they point out that literature can also "be full of prejudice and values that express the dominant hegemonic thought of the space and time in which they were written" (Riolfi and Vandeyar 1). This means that literature, or more specifically colonized literature, can have harmful consequences for society, especially when it cultivates values opposed to the socio-political project of that same society. It is therefore essential to review and decolonize FLE literature in South Africa in order to propose a curriculum that promotes the desired socio-political environment and better meets the needs of a society's citizens. However, our main question remains whether or not all Western content should be removed to achieve this goal.

The goal of this study is thus to answer the following two research questions:

1. How can the FLE literature curriculum be decolonized in South Africa?
2. Should all Western literature be removed from the curriculum in order to decolonize it?

Without formal guidelines on how to decolonize FLE in South Africa, it was necessary to consult with stakeholders in the FLE domain to try and understand how it could be decolonized. We conducted a survey (questionnaire and interviews) with 13 FLE lecturers from 10 South African universities to try and establish ways to address decolonization of the FLE literature curriculum in South Africa. The results provide approaches to be considered when putting together a decolonized curriculum and the works and themes to be studied in the literature component.

Methodology

We invited 19 FLE lecturers from 11 South African universities to participate in our research by email. South Africa has 26 universities. French not being offered as a subject at all of these institutions, we only contacted the institutions that we were sure had a French department. Of the 19 invitations sent out, 13 lecturers from 10 different universities accepted to participate in our research.

We decided to give the participants a choice between an interview and a questionnaire. We wanted to optimize the participation rate by giving this choice and also to ensure the credibility of our research. Knowing our colleagues' busy schedules, we knew that it would not be possible for everyone to make themselves available for an interview, and that a questionnaire might be more appropriate. In addition, we wanted to create circumstances that would make participants feel comfortable expressing themselves, with some being more comfortable writing than speaking and vice versa.

Table 1: Profile of the participants

Gender and years of FLE teaching experience	Questionnaire/Interview
Man, 11 years of FLE teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 63 minutes)
Woman, 14 years of FLE teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 26 minutes)
Man, 16 years of French teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 48 minutes)
Woman, 30 years of FLE/French as a second language teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 29 minutes)
Man, 31 years of FLE teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 51 minutes)
Woman, 48 years of FLE teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 68 minutes)

Man, 20 years of FLE teaching experience.	Interview (Duration: 41 minutes)
Woman, 20 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire
Man, 4 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire
Woman, 13 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire
Woman, 7 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire
Man, 33 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire
Woman, 13 years of FLE teaching experience.	Questionnaire

Due to the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 health crisis we had to conduct all interviews through Zoom, a videoconferencing platform. Zoom was selected due to its effectiveness as an online teaching and videoconferencing tool. It also has a recording functionality. We recorded all the interviews and then transcribed parts of them in order to analyze the content.

In preparation for the interviews, we created an interview guide and a questionnaire on Google Forms. Both were tested by a fellow FLE teacher. Since our mission was to describe and define the decolonization of the FLE curriculum, we compiled a dozen open-ended questions to allow participants to share their interpretations or realities in the ontological sense (Crotty 1998). The research can therefore be categorized as qualitative. According to Kawulich (2004), there is no fixed way to approach qualitative data, but it is necessary to dig deep to find common themes. We decided to analyze our data from this survey using the Saldana approach (2011). This researcher finds that a full transcript of an interview is not necessary. Instead, he suggests transcribing only those aspects that contribute to the research question. After transcribing the necessary parts one can move on to the next step which is coding. Computer software like NVivo, Atlas ti, HyperRESEARCH and Max QDA can be used to carry out the coding procedure. We used the Atlas ti software because it allows coding on a video, which facilitates the transcription step when following the Saldana approach (2011).

Results

After analyzing the data, our results enabled us to answer research question 2, namely whether we should completely remove content from France and the Western Francophone countries from the curriculum.

The answer among the FLE lecturers was unanimous: No. All participants indicated that content from France and other European and Western Francophone countries should not be completely removed from the curriculum. They provide two reasons for this. The first is based on the interest and needs of students:

> *Je suis persuadé que ça n'intéresse pas particulièrement les étudiants de français, et je vais te dire pourquoi, eux ils étudient le français pour voir plus loin et pour avoir une aperçue internationale sur le monde, ils sont très intéressés... ils ne sont pas moins intéressés par la France que par l'Afrique*. (Participant 5) [I'm convinced that doing so would not interest French students very much and I'm going to tell you why, they study French to see further, to have an international perspective of the world, they are very interested… they are as interested in studying France as they are in interested in studying Africa (Participant 5)]

> *Il faut garder en tête les deux côtés, il faut penser que oui, peut-être mon étudiant sera en France un jour et il aura besoin de ces connaissances ou en Belgique ou en Suisse ou au Canada s'il le faut, mais après tout I faut aussi prendre en considération qu'il voudrait devenir interprète, traducteur, enseignant*. (Participant 1) [You have to keep the two sides in mind, you have to think that, yes, maybe one day my student will be in France and he'll need this knowledge or in Belgium or Switzerland or Canada, but you also have to take into account that he might want to become an interpreter, translator or teacher (Participant 1)]

The second reason is linked to the quality of the program:

> *Pour moi, ce serait ridicule de ne pas enseigner les grands auteurs français sous pression politique; que vaudrait un tel diplôme?* (Participant 8) [In my opinion it would be ridiculous to not teach the famous French authors because of political pressure…what would be the use of such a degree/diploma? (Participant 1)]

Fiona Horne (2018) shares this opinion. According to her, it is important to include international or world literature in the language being taught. It functions as a resource or a skill that contributes to certain objectives linked to the working environment.

In addition to answering the question on whether or not to erase France and the Western world from the program, the results of the study led to a possible approach in decolonizing the FLE curriculum or more specifically FLE literature. This approach serves as answer to our first research question: How can the FLE literature curriculum be decolonized in South Africa?

It involves focusing first on the local context, thus South Africa. The local country's context should be the main focus in the curriculum. The scope is then extended to include contexts closest to the local context. In South African terms, this means that literary works from the French-speaking islands near South Africa, like Reunion, Madagascar and Mauritius, should be included next. The final step in this approach is then to further extend the spectrum to include Franco-African countries, and then only at the end to include content from the West.

This first part of the approach, which we will further elaborate on below, corresponds to the "glocal" approach that was recently introduced in teaching. According to Aluko et al. (2018), this approach is based on local and global perspectives: "glocal initiatives not only incorporate local perspectives and ideologies, but include some elements of the global worldview" (Aluko et al. 2018). The "glo" is derived from the English word "global" and "local" refers to the local context. The international and the local are merged to expose the learners to both the world and their own backdrop.

There are, however, challenges in adopting this local-first approach—which will be discussed further down—when teaching French literature on South African soil: there are almost no books or poems in French depicting the local context. A solution could be to study South African works, translated into French. This is what one of our participants had to say:

> *Ce qu'on pourrait faire c'est d'abord regarder les traductions des auteurs sud-africains, donc les traductions en français, ça c'est une façon d'entrer dans le vécu sud-africain. Ensuite il faudrait se concentrer sur différents pays…* (Participant 4) [What we could do is to first look at translations from South African authors, thus translations into French, that is a way to delve into South African life. Then we can further concentrate on other countries… (Participant 4)]

However, this is not the only way to approach literature in a decolonized manner. According to two teachers, the main aspect is to get students to compare literature of any origin to their own reality, to weave links between the work and their own South African context. Participant 2 uses the example of a well-known book, Le Petit Prince, and how to teach it using a decolonized approach:

> *Le Petit Prince mais le mettre dans un contexte, le contextualiser pour les étudiants même si cela n reliait pas de leur contexte mais amener cela…faire des parallèles avec leur contexte de tous les jour* (Participant 2). [The Little Prince yes, but putting it into context, contextualizing it for the students, if it doesn't come from their context but to guide them towards it…to draw parallels with their everyday context (Participant 2)].

A third important element of a decolonized approach is to place more emphasis on the students by giving them a more active role to play regarding the curriculum by including their opinion. For literature this means that several works or themes must be suggested to the students and they should choose among these propositions which seem most relevant to them. This is what one respondent told us:

> *La décolonisation implique, n'est-ce pas, l'appropriation du programme, on s'approprie le programme, on définit soi-même le programme, c'est-à-dire, selon les besoins, on essaie d'adapter aux réalités locales. Donc il y a des réalités qui ne concernent pas l'Afrique du Sud, ou l'Afrique en général, mais qui sont enseignées. Alors pourquoi enseigner quelque chose qui n'appartient qu'à Europe, alors qu'il est nécessaire d'enseigner ce qui se passe ici.* (Participant 7) [Decolonization is about taking ownership of the program, isn't it? One takes ownership and defines the program on your own, it means, according to the needs, we try to adapt according to the local realities. As a result, there are realities that have nothing to do with South Africa, or with Africa in general, but that are taught. So why teach something that only belongs to Europe, when it's necessary to teach what is happening here. (Participant 7)]

Finally, decolonizing also means prioritizing and integrating the needs of students into all educational decisions. Participant 1 echoes the importance of taking into account the needs of students, their professional aspirations, as well as the South African realities linked to identity:

> *….ça ne sert à rien d'enseigner à quelqu'un d'acheter un ticket du métro, mais il ne va jamais en France alors qu'il ne sait pas parler de sa maison de tôle…* (Participant 1) […it's no use to teach somebody how to buy a subway ticket if he's never going to go to France, when he doesn't even know how to talk about his tin-roofed house (Participant 1)]

Discussion of the Results

The findings based on the responses provided by the participants from the interviews and the questionnaires resulted in approaches to establishing a decolonized curriculum for FLE literature. The first approach, the local-first approach, proved challenging since there is scarce to no literature available in French about the South African context. A solution could be to study South African authors translated to French. This would mean one would have to embark on further research to identify these authors and study their novels for themes that comply with the social-political project of the country. We took on the challenge and put together a non-exhaustive list of South African works translated into French to consider:

Table 2: List of South African novels translated to French suitable for a decolonized curriculum

Author	**Title and date of official publication**	**Summary and pedagogical value**
Andre P. Brink	*Une saison blanche et sèche* (1980)	The book was banned in South Africa. It covers police violence during the apartheid years, which remains a current theme that can be linked to the Black Lives Matter movement.
	Un instant dans le vent (1985)	Another work that was banned in South Africa. It is about interracial love and therefore forbidden at the time.

	Au-delà du silence (2005)	This book, whose main protagonist is female, denounces the colonial and male brutality at the beginning of the twentieth century.
	Philda (2014)	The injustices of slavery and the condition of women in the 1830s are discussed in this literary work.
J.M. Coetzee (Nobel Prize for Literature)	*L'âge de fer* (2002)	Like Brink's work, Coetzee also explored police brutality during apartheid.
	Disgrâce (2002)	This book provides a cynical overview of post-apartheid South Africa. Topics such as sexual harassment, reputation and social image are discussed.
Alex La Guma	*La nuit d'Errance* (1984)	The novel takes place in Cape Town in the midst of apartheid.
Nadine Gordimer (Prix Nobel de la litterature)	*Ceux de July* (1990)	The intercultural element plays a big role in this novel that tells the story of July, a black servant who shelters her white employers during the revolt against apartheid.
	Fille de Burger (1996)	Gordimer reveals the life of Rosemarie Burger and that of her father Lionel who denounced apartheid, whereafter he is sentenced to prison where he finally dies.
	Vivre à présent (2013)	The book addresses interracial love and homosexuality in post-apartheid South Africa.
Alan Paton	*Pleure ô pays bien aimé* (1997)	A well-known novel that reveals the injustices of apartheid and the struggle for freedom.
Rosamund Haden	*L'église des pas perdus* (2008)	It is the story of two women who meet at the end of apartheid to reconcile.
Zakes Mda	*Au pays de l'ocre rouge* (2006)	A book based on the Xhosa oral culture and ancestral traditions.
Michélé Rowe	*Une heure de ténèbres* (2017)	A crime novel representing crime-ridden South African society.

	Les enfants du Cap (2017)	Another crime novel set in a township in Cape Town. Two South African characters from two different cultures must work together. The novel addresses intercultural issues by evoking current societal challenges in South Africa.

The narratives and themes tackled in some of these novels are, for the most part, in line with South-Africa's societal political project to denounce apartheid and promote reconciliation. Others paint a picture of a modern South Africa and explore certain cultures in-depth. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is but one genre: novels. This form of literature will most likely not be as accessible to novice FLE learners due to their length, but one could consider studying extracts or embarking on further research to unveil other forms of literature in French focused on the South African context.

The second approach derived from the respondents' participation entails the use of any literary work and letting the learner draw parallels to their own context. This approach simplifies the labor of researching and assessing translated South African literature for its educational value in the FLE class. A plethora of FLE activities and resources exist for well-known French classics and are accessible on the Internet. Some classics have even been rewritten for a FLE audience by simplifying the language and adding illustrations.

However, research by Saint and Shringapure (2020) discourages the excessive use of classics and focusing uniquely on texts that address racism as a theme. In their research, they examined the state of decolonization in literature in American and African universities. According to these authors, the attempt to decolonize literature only resulted in a diversified curriculum where the focus was on classical texts with racism as the main theme:

> These days, the push to decolonize the curriculum dangerously approaches a facile tokenism we wish to resist. So called classics continue to get prioritized but with commentary on racism or sexism folded in. Syllabi get sprinkled with black or brown writers, women writers, and gay writers. But these gestures are nothing more than a cursory nod to diversity. (Saint and Shringarpure)

Boris Boubacar Diop (cited by Saint and Shringapure 2020) explains that, even though African authors are being studied in some universities, this should not necessarily be seen as a decolonized approach:

> African authors are taught in both Nigeria and Senegal, however, they are almost the same ones since the time of independence: Senghor, Beti, Sembene, Kourouma etc. for the "francophones," Ngũgĩ, Achebe for the Anglophones. Quite often, one explores the text more often than the novelistic universe; *A Grain of Wheat or Things Fall Apart*, *God's Bits of Wood, Suns of Independence*… Sometimes it feels like students can recite entire passages from these books but also that they only know these.

Canonical works dominate and learners are not exposed to other African writers. Note also that there is no mention of female writers. Nevertheless, institutions like the University of Nairobi (Kenya) and the Makerere University in Kampala (Uganda), do spark hope. They place a lot of emphasis on the oratory art of African literary traditions in their quest to decolonize their literature programs (Saint and Shringapure 2020).

This means that one must think carefully about the choices of local and African works that are to be included when constructing a decolonized curriculum. Authors must be varied and one should avoid focusing on African works that have already been studied in the past. The pedagogical approach to the study of African oral literature must also be explored.

The third and final approach to decolonize the curriculum emerging from our results, or more specifically from our respondents' participation, is two-fold: the first is to give students a bigger say in the works they want to study, to decide on what should be included in the curriculum and the second is prioritizing and integrating the needs of students into all educational decisions. Although it is incontestable that student's needs should be at the forefront of curriculum design, it is debatable whether students are really able to make informed decisions about what content should be included in their curriculum.

Research in both areas should be considered. Firstly, to determine the exact needs of students and secondly to decide when and to what extent a student is capable of making decisions regarding the content of their university programs.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout this study, we had to face challenges and difficulties, of which a brief summary will be given below. The first difficulty was that only 13 university lecturers participated in this survey. W would have liked to see the participation of all the lecturers that were contacted at the beginning of this study as well as the opinions of FLE high school teachers. It might have also been useful to investigate the state of decolonizing FLE in neighboring countries of South Africa, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique who were also previously colonized.

The next obstacle in this research was that the teachers who took part in this study did not undergo training on how to teach a decolonized program. This just shows the need to develop training programs for FLE teachers in decolonizing a curriculum.

Next, this study presents a one-sided interpretation of decolonizing the curriculum, that of lecturers and does not include the voice of students. The approaches to decolonizing FLE literature identified above should be presented to students for their input. This brings us to the final challenge: these approaches have not yet been integrated and tested. To assess the success of these approaches, they must be put into practice and evaluated.

Conclusions

We started this paper by noting that the South African society urgently demands the decolonization of knowledge, pedagogy, teaching and learning. We hope that the FLE programs could be at the forefront of these transformations: FLE teaching and learning has to be decolonized. A few methods proposed by the study participants could be used in view of decolonizing the curriculum: giving students the opportunity to indicate which content and which teaching and learning methods to use in the FLE literature courses. A cylindrical approach, starting from 'local' texts (in the South African context, there are no texts written in French, so French translations of important South African literary texts constitute a useful alternative) to then proceeding towards the Francophone world. Moving between the local and the global is essential since it mimics lived experiences.

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Appendix:

Interview Guide / Questionnaire

La décolonisation et la littérature FLE

Présenter la recherche

En 2015 les etudiants a travers l'Afrique du Sud se sont manifestes contre l'esprit colonial qui regnait toujours dans les universites sud-africaines. Cela a suscite des debats sur tous les fronts, meme dans la presse internationale. De plus en plus on nous demande, les enseignants dans les universites, de revoir et "decoloniser" notre curriculum. La question se pose, qu'est-ce que cela entraine pour le FLE? Plus precisement la litterature FLE. Cet entretien porte sur la decolonisation de la litterature pour un public FLE.

Votre participation à cette recherche est volontaire. L'information que vous partagez aujourd'hui sera utilisée dans mon rapport de recherche et d'éventuelles publications. Etes-vous sûr de vouloir participer? Conformément à la loi relative à l'informatique, aux fichiers et aux libertés du 6 janvier 1978, vous bénéficiez d'un droit d'accès et de rectification des informations qui vous concernent, que vous pouvez exercer en vous adressant à mialouisebotha@yahoo.com

Questions:

1. Quelle est votre nationalite?
2. Pourriez-vous me parler un peu de votre parcours dans l'enseignement du FLE? (depuis combine de temps enseignez-vous le FLE et ou)
3. Avez-vous deja enseigne la litterature dans un contexte FLE? (depuis/pendant combien de temps?)
4. Dans l'etablissement ou vous enseignez le FLE, comment la litterature est-elle abordee? Quels oeuvres/themes sont enseignes a quel niveau? Est-ce qu'il y a une raison derriere cela?
5. Plus specifiquement au niveau B2/honours qu'est-ce que vous enseignez en ce qui concerne la litterature?
6. Selon vous, quels sont les besoins langagieres d'un apprenant B1/B2 en honours litterature? Qu'est-ce qui devrait etre enseigne par les professeurs? Quelles competences, le professeur, devrait-il developper lors d'un module de litterature honours?
7. En Afrique du Sud on nous encourage dans les universites de revoir notre curriculum et de le "decoloniser." Qu'est-ce que vous pensez que cela veut dire en general? Comment interpretezvous la decolonisation d'un curriculum?
8. A votre avis, peut-on decoloniser l'enseignement du FLE? Pourquoi? Et comment?
9. Et la litterature FLE? Peut-on "decoloniser" les oeuvres/themes qu'on traite?

10. Est-ce qu'il y a des oeuvres/themes/poemes qu'on pourrait considerer comme "decolonizes"? Lesquels?
11. Y a-t-il des oeuvres "decolonisees" au niveau B2 que l'on pourrait enseigner en contexte FLE?

Remercier le participant.

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"I don't want him in my heart. I want him here with me": On Tim Burton's Frankenweenie (2012)

Abstract: *Frankenweenie* (2012) is amongst the most personal films directed by Tim Burton because it reflects the director's visual aesthetics and thematic obsessions, while also being a composite of different bodies: monstrous, anomalous, literary and cinematic. In this sense, the film serves as a container for Burton's art and creative view. Basing our analysis on research developed by Salisbury (2000) and Weinstock (2013), this study looks at ideas of monstrosity (Mittman, 2016) and the monstrous bodies portrayed in the film, which are connected with the other "bodies" the director creates and reanimates. Victor and Sparky, but also the film itself, are constructions deriving from literature and cinema and, consequently, can be viewed as bodies produced from a palimpsest of ideas and concepts. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to look into the different bodies explored in the film, while trying to understand how the director has contributed to the ongoing discussion of what it means to be monstrous and, therefore, what it means to be human.

Keywords: Monster, Frankenstein, Frankenweenie, Tim Burton, Bodies, Cinema

Introduction—"Now Is the Time of Monsters": The Monstrous Context

In his seminal work *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996) Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that looking at the monstrous bodies imagined, produced and/or reclaimed by a culture can be a useful method of reading that very same culture. The monster as a concept, idea or belief becomes a means through which we can gain a privileged outlook on human society. Yet, what one culture might deem monstrous, another may not. In other words, the others' monsters may not be our monsters, and vice-versa. Fabricating the monster as well as "imagining otherness necessarily involves constructing the borderlands, the boundary spaces that contain—in the double sense, to enclose and to include—what is antithetical to the self" (Uebel 265). What this implies is that how we construct monsters or monstrosity is deeply tied to how we identify ourselves, our place in the world and even our sense of what is normal and ergo what is not. In this sense, monsters help anchor our (or more broadly a culture's) sense of identity by establishing that 'we are not like them,' that is, we are not monsters. As a result, monsters are often pushed to the farthest corners of one's world; whether in discourse or geographically, monstrous and unusual bodies are located at the borders, which we build and they patrol, reassuring us of our own normalcy (or so we hope) while at the same time reminding us of their impending presence. A notorious example of this is the Alien (1979; 1986; 1992; 1997) science-fiction horror/action media franchise in which outer space is the outskirts, the final frontier, wherein all kinds of monstrosities and miscreations are possible and, hence, a suitable location for exorcising our fears. Further, by identifying monstrous geographies with far off locations it is possible to more easily think about what makes the monster from a safe, sheltered distance.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in particular, monsters can be found to dwell relatively undetected in human society, as can be seen in such fantasy works as the *Twilight Series* (2005-2008) by Stephenie Meyer, but also in crime novels like the *Hannibal Lecter* series (1981; 1988; 1999; 2006) by Thomas Harris, for instance. Although these are different examples from very distinct genres, they prove how the concept of monstrosity mutates and transverses

literary and cultural boundaries. On the one hand, while in Meyer's novels vampires and werewolves—creatures traditionally depicted as evil—can be friends or foes, they still remain marginal, as they are neither fully human, nor inhuman. On the other hand, Harris' work, along with its 1991 on-screen adaptation, does not feature fantastic beings, but explores the darkness in the human soul through the serial killers Hannibal Lecter and James "Buffalo Bill" Gumb. Harris' characters are, thus, actual men and women, but their actions are monstrous; theirs is a monstrosity that comes from within and is just as dangerous.

These are particularly relevant points since issues like 'what is a monstrous being?' or 'how can we define or distinguish the monster?' lie at the core of contemporary monster studies. To provide an answer to these questions has been difficult seeing as Cohen points out, that "the monster refuses easy categorization" (6). Monsters are neither fully beast nor human, they are hybrids for their incoherent bodies defy any attempt to somehow include them in an organized system. Therefore, they are also dangerous; their existence threatens hierarchical, geographical, economic, racial, and sexual classification, to name but a few categories. To apprehend or confine the monster into a complete epistemology is hopeless. If every culture is likely to build its own monster(s), then to come up with a definition that encompasses all possible variations is a nearly impossible task. Nevertheless, some features might be discernable, as monsters also seem to share a number of common characteristics.

First, monsters are not real, in the sense that they are creations of the human imagination which projects its fears and anxieties onto the monstrous, but also its most intimate desires. Having recently celebrated the two-hundredth birthday of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), the novel serves as an example of this concept, as it discusses a number of deeply modern themes, such as the impact of the development of science and the consequences of subverting the laws of nature. When the young and ambitious Victor Frankenstein decides to create a "new species," effectively taking on the role of the creator, he ends up "giving birth" to a monstrous offspring. Since Frankenstein's abnormal progeny is so bestial, the Creature's countenance horrifies its creator:

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set… no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. (34-35)

Instead of triumph and joy, Frankenstein sees in the Creature a being that is antithetical to himself: he does not recognize in it anything resembling a man, but a nameless "thing" (35). Shelley thus explores one of the greatest fears surrounding the advancement of science, since, much like science fiction novels, TV series, films and so on, have done throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Frankenstein deals with the results of Man playing God. The author seems to invite her readers to consider what outcomes Humankind can expect from taking on such an unnatural (or ungodly) role. What will happen if Humanity is able to generate artificial life whose intelligence can match that of its maker? Intriguingly, this issue is still quite contemporaneous and keeps being addressed by science-fiction works, such as *Blade Runner* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1982), *The Terminator* (Dir. James Cameron, 1984), and more recently the TV show *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-). In Shelley's work, Victor Frankenstein can neither see beyond his immediate goal nor anticipate the disastrous results of his experience—which will eventually lead to the deaths of his brother, William, his beloved Elizabeth and the De Lacey family.

However, in a riveting narrative twist, the Creature is not innately evil, instead he grows wicked, "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (66), due to the lack of fraternal love, loneliness and the merciless behavior he is subjected to. Initially he does not seek to harm Frankenstein but flees after being

rejected by him. With the De Lacey he hopes for companionship and happier days but is struck by Felix who seems in him "only a detestable monster" (90). Therefore, his creation is not the horrible, treacherous being Frankenstein deems him to be from the beginning. He effectively becomes the monster other characters expect him to be after being exposed to violent and cruel treatment. Because Frankenstein and the De Lacey are disgusted and frightened by the Creature's appearance, they behave harshly and inhumanely toward him, therefore, in a sense also becoming monstrous themselves.

As Sibylle Elre and Helen Hendry further discuss in their edited collection Monsters: interdisciplinary explorations of monstrosity (2020): "The Monster, to be clear, is ugly but kind and these qualities coexist throughout the story" (n/p). Elre and Hendry emphasize this idea when they comment that "[t]he Monster kills Frankenstein's youngest brother William but is not to blame because it was abandoned by its maker; it is a victim" (n/p). By offering a justification for the Creature's behavior, Shelley encourages the readers to truly consider the motives behind his terrifying actions. While, unlike what Elre and Hendry suggest, we do not believe readers are meant to "feel compassion" (n/p) for the Creature when he murders William, we agree that the ambiguous nature of Frankenstein's offspring and the scientist's uncompassionate conduct add layers of meaning to the story, allowing the reader/audience to ponder upon what the meaning of monstrosity is, inescapably begging the question: 'who is(are) the monster(s) after all?'

This question may help explain why some researchers have already implied that humankind produces monsters to be able to think about itself and its place in the world (Gil 2006). The monsters can then serve, as the etymological root (monstrare) of the term implies, to show, reveal or explore, as they can expose our concerns about ourselves and about others around us. Simultaneously, monsters (as monstrum, which derives from the root monere) can teach (what behaviors are to be followed) and to warn (about the consequences of not doing so).

Second, monsters can be distinguished by the place they inhabit, which is traditionally located at the borders of the known world, whether this means unexplored areas on planet Earth, like the depths of the oceans, or, more frequently since the second half of the twentieth century, in outer space. In addition, the monster's physical aspect equally marks it as different either because there is a bodily surplus, such as extra arms, legs or even extra height, as is the case of giants, or there is an absence, like a missing eye, as is the case of the cyclops for instance. The monstrous (body) may also result from a combination of a human body with that of an animal, such as mermaids, who are half woman, half fish or bird. Conventionally, the monster's physical form is at heart different from what a society may regard as normal, which clarifies why the monstrous' body can take on numerous shapes. Nevertheless, today this is not always so since, as already mentioned, for contemporary audiences the monster may well be the neighbor next door. In such cases, the monster is identified not by its guise, but by its actions, which denotes a clear transformation in how the monster is perceived. According to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock: "When our monsters change, it reflects the fact that we—our understanding of what it means to be human, our relations with one another and to the world around us, our conception of our place in the greater scheme of things—have changed as well" ("Invisible Monsters" 275).

If in Shelley's text the readers are already faced with ambiguous issues concerning Frankenstein's experiment—did he create a monster when he infused "a spark of being into the lifeless thing" (34) or after he rejected that life?—modern-day representations of monstrosity go one step further in depicting monstrous deformed bodies positively. Populated by strange and bizarre bodies, Tim Burton's films are, as we will further explore, an example of that for though the abnormal forms created by the director remain symbols of the "Other," the unknown, their nature is benign.

For the purpose of this essay, and given the difficulty in answering one of this article's key questions—'what is a monster?'—, we will take into account Asa Simon Mittman's theory in the "Introduction" to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2012). In this text, the author claims that

we can never fully determine what a monster is based on, its physicality or traits, but must instead analyze the monstrous body(ies) through its impact or effect, since,

> Above all, the monstrous is that which creates this sense of vertigo, that which calls into question our (their, anyone's) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us (often with fangs at our throats, with fire upon our skin, even as we and our stand-ins and body-doubles descend the gullet) to acknowledge the failures of our systems of categorization. (8)

Mittman's work allows us to look at the concepts of monstrosity and the monstrous bodies presented in *Frankenweenie* and in most of Burton's works from a particular theoretic angle. Burton's films are intimately connected with the idea of the "monstrous" body, since his creativity is the result of many sources, a palimpsest of bizarre, strange and different influences (literary and cinematographic) that call our attention by questioning what is and what is not normal or different.

A Very Short Introduction to the World of Tim Burton

According to several sources (Salisbury; Odell and Le Blanc; and Weinstock), Tim Burton possesses a very distinct style to the point that the adjective "Burtonesque" describes a specific cinematic world with its own imagery and rules. Indeed, if one were to describe "Burtonesque," it would potentially include elements that vary according to the different periods of Burton's cinematography.

However, and since such a definition will help to better understand the author's creations, a possible interpretation would be the "… specific elements that make up the director's films, such as his frequent use of heroic loners, nightmarish sets, surreal humor or even scary clowns" (Horton). Included in this definition are, of course, his eccentric and marginal (as well as monstrous) characters. Vincent (Vincent Price), Beetle Juice (Michael Keaton), Jack Skellington (Danny Elfman/Chris Sarandon) or Edward Scissorhands (Johnny Depp), to name but a few, belong to a fantastic world clearly influenced by certain literary genres (as is the case of the world of Fairytales, the Gothic or the Horror stories by Edgar Allan Poe) or certain cinematic movements (such as German Expressionism and the Horror films produced by the Hammer Studios).

These are characters that allow the director to develop key motifs in his films: the grotesque, madness, science experiments, death, family or loneliness. Burton's stories create a particular intimate atmosphere between viewer(s) and character(s) that, upon entering his cinematic world, usually feel sympathetic towards the marginally, eccentric and unusual bodies that the director presents us. As Frances Pheasant-Kelly further comments (16), Burton's films work as spaces where the "everyday and the living" co-exist with beings that are different, as these defy the very definition of "normal." Evident examples can include innocent characters such as Edward Scissorhands, whose hands are replaced by scissors; tormented and deformed characters like Penguin (Danny Devito) and Sweeney Todd (Johnny Depp) or even unconventional and misunderstood characters like Ed Bloom (Ewan McGregor). Their physical characterization—scissor hands, extravagant garments, abnormal, deformed and abject bodies—, their emotional state—haunted, tortured, taunted—, or their adventurous, out of the box fantasy way of living, would be reason enough for the viewers to react negatively to their presence or existence. Instead, their marginal, slightly strange and monstrous condition is to be explored not as a negative feature, but as a virtue, an idea that the director mentions in an interview granted to Mark Salisbury, where he comments that when he watched monster movies, he "always felt most monsters were basically misperceived" (2).

As Burton further develops in the interview, there is a major concern with characters that lack a (cinematic) representation capable of revealing their true nature. In this sense, a closer look at Burton's creations will show that characters who are usually perceived as villains in traditional narratives are presented as misunderstood heroes in his films. Therefore, and contrary to what is explored in

traditional horror tales, the viewer is faced with stories about "honesty, openness, integrity" and the force of "creativity" (Weinstock, "Mainstream Outsider" 27). The greatest examples of these issues are short films like *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie* (the 1984 short),[35] works like Edward Scissorhands (1990), *Corpse Bride* (2005) or the 2012 *Frankenweenie*. In all of them Burton develops characters that break away from the apparent tranquility of the space they inhabit and, therefore, are presented as figures that disrupt normalcy.

Thus, "Burtonesque" also alludes to the fact that Burton's universe "employs a number of recurring themes that create a cohesive and personal vision" (Odell and Le Blanc 14)[36] where the amount of emotional and aesthetic involvement that the director devotes to his films is clear. As Barkman and Sanna (X) claim: "[h]is distinctive and personal touch justifies… the affirmation that Burton is truly a visionary director."

Likewise, his unique and unusual vision is what allows him to underline the potential danger of a normal world. By focusing his narratives on the eccentric universe of his characters, Burton puts the "Other" in permanent dialogue with the spectator while, at the same time, creating a space where stories about odd, marginal figures are at the center of the narrative. Thus, the director's strategy is, more often than not, to use classic stories to subvert and rework them according to contemporary issues and to his particular vision, focusing on them as heroes, not as villains.

As such, although his worlds are identified with the sinister and the macabre, Burton approaches these themes in a pleasant and inspiring way, as Weinstock further develops:

> […] in place of horror, Burton substitutes humor, sentimentality, and hope. Instead of dread, Burton's films arguably elicit a sort of free-floating postmodern euphoria as the viewer, floating in a sea of references to other texts and persistently reminded of the film's status as a film, experiences the pleasure of recognition and is invited to share Burton's celebration of Hollywood's traditional margins—the campy, the cult, the creepy, and the sublimely ridiculous. Burton's films invite us finally to be like him: lovers of stories whose tastes once were unorthodox and rebellious. ("Mainstream Outsider" 27)

Consequently, mad scientists, girls with pins in their bodies, skeletons, freaks, fragmented or incomplete bodies, corpses, among others, are not only recurrent in the director's films, but also the rule rather than the exception. This subversion lends a new meaning to the stories and opens the possibility of an integrative space for those who are usually portrayed as marginal and, because they are different, misunderstood. In a way, it is possible to claim that Burton's characters possess a self-reflexive feature—even in terms of physical properties, with the most obvious example being Vincent or Victor—which shows that the themes and motifs explored in his films are not foreign to him not only as a director, but also as a human being.

Taking this into account, in the next section of this study we will discuss some of the major ideas presented in *Frankenweenie* by looking at the bodies that are explored in the film (literary but mostly cinematographic). In order to proceed with our analysis, we will look into how Frankenweenie depicts the contrast between different ideas of monstrosity as well as how the director has continuously contributed to the ongoing discussion of what it means to be monstrous and, therefore, what it means to be human.

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[35] Although we are referring to the 1984 *Frankenweenie,* the film under analysis here is the 2012 remake version of the short film.

[36] The introduction by Odell and Le Blanc (2005) to Tim Burton's work actually establishes a series of characteristics that are common in the author's films: genre subversion, classical horror and b-flicks, angst and the outsider, character's origins, the bastards sons of Frankenstein, disrespect for authority, stripes and swirls, weird sciences and domestic appliances, television, snow, dogs or Tim Burton himself are some of the examples.

Thus, while the first part briefly considers the influence of Shelley's Frankenstein on the film, the second part singles out some of the visual/cinematic influences represented in Frankenweenie, and the third and last part considers the idea of (bodily) monstrosity in the film.

A Reading of *Frankenweenie* (2012)

Frankenweenie reflects many of Burton's visual aesthetics and thematic obsessions and is also a composite of different bodies, in particular in what concerns literary and cinematographic influences. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is essential to understand a great number of the director's films, in particular the works (e.g.: *Edward Scissorhands*, *Ed Wood* [1994]), where he focuses on themes like science, madness or monstrosity. References to the Frankenstein monster can be seen throughout Burton's oeuvre as well as his other projects (museum exhibitions, for instance) and work as producer. The 1818 text, and consequently its filmic adaptations by James Whale, *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), play a key role in the 2012 feature, as Burton also pays homage to classic Horror films[37] and to the actors of that period and later on—Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff or Vincent Price.

This is the fourth stop-motion film by Burton and it tells the story of Victor (Charlie Tahan) who, inspired by his science teacher Mr. Rzykrusk (Martin Landau), who much resembles Vincent Price, finds a way of resurrecting his dead dog, Sparky. However, his friends also want to do the same to their pets and the imaginary town of New Holland, where the action takes place, ends up being invaded by uncontrollable resurrected pet-monsters as the science experiment of resurrection gets out of control. This very short description of the plot underlines the relationship of the film with Shelley's text. Besides the many visual allusions to *Frankenstein*, *Frankenweenie* is also a story about life and death, the uncontrollable power of science and its misuse (through unnatural modes of reproduction), and childhood vs. adulthood. It is in this last point that the film distances itself from Shelley's novel, or even from its most popular adaptations, as Burton sets the film within a world where children are the main protagonists,[38] maybe because they still represent an innocence that, contrary to adults, cherishes the true nature of things.[39]

Along these lines, *Frankenweenie* is much more than a story on monstrous constructions, as it is revealed that it is as a film in which love prevails at the time of creation. This is also what distinguishes both Victor and Sparky from all the other resurrected animals and the other children. For that reason, it becomes clear that wanting the animals alive is not enough for them to be properly resurrected; you have to love them as well and that is why Sparky, contrary to other pets, is loved as he is, even with its monstrous features.

This idea generates an interesting (creative) gap between Shelley's text and Burton's film. While the first is a text characterized by a lack of understanding and love (Mellor)—as Victor rejects his creation because he sees it as a monster—the latter is fixated on the importance of love when one is creating. Only by putting yourself into the object created, can you understand it and accept its true nature. As a result, *Frankenweenie* is not a story of rejection owing to the fact that, much like Burton, Victor accepts his

[37] At the same time, Burton explores several references in the film that are important to register here. A list includes, among many other films, *The Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935)—Elsa Van Helsing's dog Persephone; *The Mummy* (Dir. Karl Freund, 1932)—Nassor's Colossus; *The Wolfman* (Dir. George Waggner, 1941)—Weird Girl's the Were-Rat*; Godzilla* (Dir. Ishirō Honda, 1954) or *Gamera: The Giant Monster* (Dir. Noriaki Yuasa, 1965)—the giant turtle; Gremlins (Dir. Joe Dante, 1984)—Edgar's sea monsters.

[38] Also, what sets this film apart from the original classical horror films is that "Victor is not the only unusual person in New Holland," as A.O. Scott demonstrates in his review of the film. Additionally, the children retain certain amusing and, thus, laughable features, which breaks with the typical environment of Horror stories.

[39] Contrary to this argument, Rebecca Lloyd (81) notes that the children are also aware of the problem they have created and that even Victor recognizes that it is necessary to destroy the other creatures.

creation, and acknowledges his new way of existing. Thus, although Sparky is no longer the dog he used to be, as he is an animal reanimated from different parts characterized by the embodiment of "the threat of the porous body," as Rebecca Lloyd points out (92), he is still accepted by Victor and the villagers at the end of the film. The "weenie" in the title, then, is considered to be a distinguishable feature that adds a new dimension to the film: while the director focuses his attention on telling the story of marginal characters, he also reduces their monstrous dimension when compared to the original creations.

Yet, for Burton, the film is also a way of referring to his other works and piecing them (back) together. Much like *Frankenstein*, *Frankenweenie* is composed of different assembled parts, which makes it the perfect metaphor for the act of creation. In this regard, and according to Weinstock, the film can be understood as a composite monster created from diverse sources:

> …the film itself functions as a kind of textual Frankenstein's monster, a cinematic pastiche assembled out of the bits and pieces not only of Burton's cinematic career but of Hollywood horror more generally. To the viewer with the requisite Burton and horror "literacies," it quickly becomes clear that the expanded *Frankenweenie* engages in complex and persistent processes of citationality and adaptation as it derives its charge from its connections to other works—Mary Shelley's canonical Gothic novel, Burton's earlier works, and classic horror films. What Burton has done with the 2012 *Frankenweenie* is to take the original work from 1984, build onto it with pieces from his other films, and then shock it into life by connecting it to the whole history of cinematic horror. ("Mainstream Outsider" 1-2)

The revival of different parts of Burton's films, along with many other references we have seen, culminates in Sparky's character. Victor's faithful companion is linked directly to other *Frankenstein* filmic adaptations and is a crucial metaphor for the act of creation as well as a powerful metacinematographic device. Weinstock underlines this issue by drawing our attention to the three major influences used in the film: first, and as previously mentioned, the novel *Frankenstein*. Secondly, and also briefly explored in this study, Horror cinema. Finally, Burton citing Burton, which is a recurring feature of the director: there are several mentions to other Burton films in *Frankenweenie*, as if the director was trying to "resurrect" some of his earlier creations.

In this regard, a Burton connoisseur will immediately connect the 2012 *Frankenweenie* with the two early short-films Vincent and, obviously, the original *Frankenweenie*, both of which tackle themes that would be followed in future features. Vincent occupies a special place in Burton's cinematography with the main character, Vincent Malloy, acting as the director's alter ego. Both Vincent and Burton (scientist/creator) work on the margins of normality and prefer a world composed of shadows and darkness, but not in a negative way. Hence, the suggestion that, in Burton's films, the idea of monstrosity serves the purpose of putting the definition of normal into perspective. As we are confronted with the "Other," we are also reminded of our own monstrous condition. The original *Frankenweenie* continues some of the themes developed in Vincent, and it is the basis for the 2012 film: the same story and the same protagonist. Similarly, *Frankenweenie* is also a remake of James Whale's *Frankenstein*—Victor, the protagonist, struggles to make his neighbors understand his fascination with everything macabre.

These allusions are not isolated cases in Burton's cinematography. The director makes use of more or less of the same (visual and literary) influences throughout his other films. Such is the case of *Edward Scissorhands*, where Burton again employs the Frankenstein/monster motif to criticize suburban America (a continuous location in the director's works). Although at the very beginning of the film Edward is accepted by the community, he is quickly rejected when his (in)ability becomes a threat. Also, other films like *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) or *Corpse Bride*—stop-motion films like *Frankenweenie*—have an important influence on *Frankenweenie*: they are both stories about life and death and, much like Jack Skellington and Victor Van Dort, Victor Frankenstein is a loner. They are also very similar in terms of the

story they tell, and the aesthetics used. As such, *Frankenweenie* is strongly shaped by the idea of reanimation: the reanimation of Shelley's novel; the reanimation of Burton's films that are themselves (already) reanimations of classical Horror films, and the reanimation of a variety of bodies.

A non-extensive list includes, for instance, in the case of humans, Mr. Burgmeister (Martin Short), resembling Finis Everglot from the *Corpse Bride*; Bob's Mom (Conchata Ferrel) who resembles both Mrs. Curtis, played by Hellen Boll in the original short, and similarly the Corpse Mom from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*; Susan Frankenstein (Catherine O'Hara) resembling Veronica Everglot from *Corpse Bride*, or Elsa Van Helsing (Wynona Rider) who, is not only the female correspondent to Victor, but also a potential allusion to both *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Edward Scissorhands*. Consequently, and as Geal further expands, in *Frankenweenie* "the animation medium replicates the narrative's reanimation of the inanimate, with the diegetic male creator Victor both scientist and filmmaker, and both creator of reanimated life and reanimated film images" (272).

Likewise, and when considering that the film was inspired by a real-life dog (Pepe) that Burton had as a kid, it is also noteworthy how film (as a medium) is used here as a form of reanimation. An instrumental scene to better understand this is when Spaky dies and Victor´s mother tries to comfort him by saying that, "When you lose someone you love, they never really leave you. They just move into a special place in your heart. He'll always be there, Victor." Inconsolable, he claims that, "I don't want him in my heart. I want him here with me" which not only points towards his future experiment with science in order to reanimate Sparky, but also as to how Burton, as a creator and director, uses film as a vehicle to infuse (cinematic) life to his long-lost dog. No longer able to recover Pepe, Burton utilizes cinema as a form of making him immortal, forever imprinted in this story.

The idea of reanimation is also key to understand the different monstrous bodies present in the film. When Edgar "E" Gore (Atticus Shaffer) finds out that Victor reanimated Sparky, he tells the other children about Victor's secret which eventually leads to the creation of more unruly animal bodies that are, in turn, the expression of their owners. Although Victor is considered weirder than his colleagues, in particular Edgar, Nassor (Martin Short), Toshiaki (James Hiroyuki Liao), Bob (Robert Capron), or even Weird Girl (Catherine O'Hara), they are depicted as physically bizarre characters. For instance, Edgar's character, who much resembles Ygor from *Son of Frankenstein* (Dir. Rowland V. Lee, 1939), has missing teeth and a hunchback. Similarly, this can also be applied to the character's personality because they try to steal Victor's reanimation secrets in order to win the school's science fair. Their intentions, thus, contrary to Victor's, are not good.

Consequently, when they experiment with reanimation, chaos reigns. The pet monsters created by them: the sea monkeys (Bob); Were-Rat (Edgar);[40] Mummy Hamster (Nassor); Shelly or Turtle Monster (Toshiaki) and the Vampire-Cat (Weird Girl's Mr. Whisker's and the main antagonist to Sparky) are examples of scientific experiments gone awry, but also of the perils science can present when the creators' intentions are not noble. The contrast between these monsters and Sparky is obvious on account of the dangers they present, becoming a menace to New Holland and to the creators themselves. Their bodies are excessive (the giant Turtle), impossible to tame (the Were-Rat), and active agents of mayhem. As a result, they increase the character's worst features: Bob's gullible personality; Edgar's troublesome and unruly nature; Nassor's jealousy towards Victor; Toshiaki's power hungry and competitive traits and, finally, Weird Girl's strangeness and eccentricity.

Sparky's reanimation, though, results in a process in which Victor uses different items from the kitchen, as Geal notes (265), thus emphasizing the domestic recognizable body of the dog. Bolts, stitches,

[40] Rebecca Lloyd (90) also notes that, in Edgar's case, his first experiment with Victor causes his fish to disappear, thus accentuating the way the pet "fails to exist at all."

and other objects compose Sparky's body but, in particular to the other bodies, he is neither too big, nor too little or scary. It is just a matter of perspective, and here of cinematic perspective specifically, since Sparky remains the same: a faithful dog and Victor's loving companion. A great example of this is the "expressionist" scene where Sparky's shadow is projected onto a wall making him seem bigger than he really is, which causes Bob's mother to be frightened by his shape.

Accordingly, and despite the many references to dark and bizarre worlds, Burton's cinematographic universe is not devoid of hope and heart (Cheu 3), particularly in the case of *Frankenweenie*, since, as a scientist/creator, Victor acknowledges his mistakes and seems more mature than the adults themselves. By placing Sparky, a dog and man's most faithful companion, as the monster, Burton is working with a character that is immediately recognizable to us as well. This further underscores the way New Holland's community rejects even what they already know, only to accept it at the end. Sparky may be a dog that was reclaimed from the world of the dead and, therefore, has a monstrous image after being reanimated from different parts, but the affections between him and Victor remain the same. Yet, this is not the case of the other children and their pets that indeed become monsters.

The final scene of the film, similar to the ending scene in Whale's Frankenstein, demonstrates a major difference between Victor and the other children and between Sparky and the other pets. Both Victor and Sparky are portrayed as heroes because they try to fix the evil that resulted from a misuse of science (the pet monsters). In this sense, and again opposed to Whale's film, Sparky does not die at the hands of the enraged population but is saved by them as they work together to reanimate the dog for the second time.

Accepting Sparky means also accepting his monstrous image and true nature. *Frankenweenie* may be a film in which Victor refuses to learn to cope with Sparky's passing and decides to bring him back to life, and this action brings monstrous consequences, but much like the fantasy worlds Burton appreciates, the story cannot end in disaster. In Burton's unique cinematic vision there is hope to correct and learn from the mistakes we make. Within this context, by learning from his errors, Victor returns as a hero and Sparky is again welcomed to the community.

In this sense, there is a positive tone to the film that cannot be broken. Therefore, the film elevates and dignifies the image of the scientist/creator/author to a different level, one in which its depiction is not linked to madness, transgression or destruction. With this idea, Burton is sending us (viewers) a particular message: when the spirit and will prevail, it is possible to create something beautiful even if it does not match normal standards. That is why in Burton's grotesque, bizarre and weird world, the idea of monstrosity is inverted: the real monster, then, is the one who cannot accept or does not have the ability to love.

Conclusions

Frankenweenie depicts a marginal and strange universe, displaying Burton's tendency to invert the rules and concepts by which we abide. Consequently, what is portrayed as marginal, abnormal an eccentric becomes genuine and true. In *Frankenweenie* it is possible to understand the complex relationship that the film establishes with Shelley's novel and some of its early adaptations, but also with Burton's other films, thus originating a great number of bodies that the author uses to give new meaning(s) to some of the themes explored in his previous works. Hence, the film functions as a vehicle for the director to reread his own production, reproduction and creation.

Additionally, and above all, *Frankenweenie* reveals Burton's ability to observe and reflect upon our contemporaneity and what it means to be a monster, thus contributing to a new way of looking at monstrosity. For though Sparky's body may seem like that of a monster/monstrous creature due to its difference, especially if we consider that "[t]he monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among

us" (Cohen 7), and his "rebirth" an unnatural (or some would call it ungodly) experience, his behavior makes him a hero.

Monstrosity, therefore, cannot be read—like it was for so many centuries and often still is—as a mere set of bodily/physical characteristics, but as something beyond that. True monstrosity lies within, Burton implies. As Johnson Cheu remarks in the introduction to *Tim Burton: Essays on Films* (3), Burton has always tried to find a way to include the outsider, the marginal and the misfit in his films and "to find a way and a place for him or her to be," which is also what *Frankenweenie* is about.

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An Outcast's Identity Is No Joke: The Myth of Sisyphus in *Joker*

Abstract: Mental illnesses, in their dyadic nature as entities in a liminal space between medically defined pathologies and cultural representations, are often too obscure and abstract to be properly defined. Most often, even, those pathologies as understood by the medical community differ wildly from the mythical representations thereof in society. This article explains why and how those terms are recurrently misused when mass media try to diagnose literary and film characters in a pathologizing process, and why analyzing characters through a cultural, mythocritical and psychoanalytical lens is more appropriate. These ideas are expounded and practiced with the analysis of Todd Phillips's *Joker* (2019), and how its protagonist, Arthur Fleck, can be read as a revisitation of Albert Camus's Sisyphus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which informs the main character's katabasis, or descent into the depths of society and his own psyche in a quest for identity.

Keywords: Joker, myth of Sisyphus, psychopathy, process of individuation, identity, outcasts.

Introduction

Introduction

'Our Billy wasn't born a criminal, Clarice. He was made one through years of systematic abuse. Billy hates his own identity, you see.' For Dr Hannibal Lecter, in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), it is clear that criminals need not be born as such. Arthur Fleck, the protagonist of Joker, is presented at the beginning of the film as a disenfranchised, middle-aged, white male struggling to make ends meet in 1981 depressed Gotham city. He is, however, also portrayed as a child, from a cognitive-developmental standpoint. His inability to provide, to let go of his mother, or to find a love object for himself, marks him as unfulfilled in his quest for identity and psychosexual development. Moreover, Fleck lives in a society whose values no longer align with his own, and this only compounds the issue of finding an identity.

The first part of the essay sheds some light on what Arthur Fleck is going through during the film. It begins with an overview of what much of the media has offered in terms of psychological profiling and character analysis. Why the vast majority of the media coincides in the diagnosis of psychopathy, what this actually means, and whether or not it is accurate. Secondly, a theory is provided whereby Arthur Fleck is analyzed through a philosophical and mythographical lens in order to explain his inner struggle and drive throughout the film, and whether or not he is best read as a psychopath or as a modern Sisyphus. The second part of the essay provides an account of Arthur Fleck's quest for identity and his process of psychological individuation. To this end, Jacques Lacan's theory of Psychosexual Development and Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection are used.

Psychopathy: Both a Myth and a Medical Diagnosis

Nineteen eighty-one Gotham is presented as a completely depressed and poverty-stricken city. The ongoing public sector strikes and the high unemployment and paucity rates paint a grim situation. Arthur Fleck—portrayed by Joaquin Phoenix in the film—who can barely survive working as a clown, has dreams of making it as a stand-up comedian. The character we are presented with, however, seems ill-suited for the task: his mental problems and nervous laughter make those around him uncomfortable and, with the added difficulty to empathize with him, his *vis comica* suffers. Nevertheless, he is also a benevolent and beneficent character at the beginning: several times in the film, he claims the meaning of his life to be making other people laugh and seems genuinely unhappy to realize how those around him are uncivil and self-centered. The foregoing notwithstanding, the vast majority of critical works and news articles have quickly depicted the Joker as a psychopath (Dodgson, 2019; Rose, 2019; West, 2019), and have presented solid evidence. Is he, however?

First of all, it must be stated that any attempt to fully and accurately diagnose a literary character by means of analyzing their acts and motives can quickly become an exercise in futility, depending on the expectations. Most mental disorders require the undivided attention of a fully trained clinical psychologist or psychiatrist to be diagnosed, and also to have more access and interaction with the patient. What can be done, instead, is analyzing and describing symptoms and patterns, along with the socio-cultural and mythical representations that a character might portray.

Second, the concept of *psychopathy* can also be difficult to work with, owing to being more of a pop term than a valid diagnosis (Cameron 87-94; Skeem et al. 97). Traditionally considered a subtype of the umbrella term *Antisocial Personality Disorder* along with sociopathy, psychopathy has for decades permeated our culture and imagination (McCready 3-7; Surette 30-35) to the point that its influence has been bidirectional. As Sarah Scott McCready says, “the general public may be using the media as their only means of interpretation on crime issues” (3); conversely, the general population has repeatedly used and embellished this term outside the medical field, thus effectively creating a myth. The mythological psychopath often portrayed in films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) or *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000) is usually a relentless, impulsive, and cold murderer, most often gifted with an outstanding intellect and charm. However, the diagnosis, when it has been used in the medical field, has been adjudged to people with vastly different criteria. So, what is a psychopath?

In 1941, Hervey M. Cleckley wrote *The Mask of Sanity: An Attempt to Clarify Some Issues About the So-Called Psychopathic Personality*, a book which has informed public opinion of what psychopathy represents as the most influential clinical description of psychopathy, and also because of its impact on culture and society (Meloy 9; Lynam and Gudonis 392-395). In it, Cleckley himself, an expert in psychopathy, defines sanity as a “protean concept,” and argues that everybody "behaves at times with something short of complete rationality and good judgment" (4). He did, however, include a set of common behavioral features that defined the condition, namely:

Superficial charm and good intelligence
Absence of delusions and other signs of irrational thinking
Absence of nervousness or psychoneurotic manifestations
Unreliability
Untruthfulness and insincerity
Lack of remorse and shame
Inadequately motivated antisocial behavior
Poor judgment and failure to learn by experience
Pathologic egocentricity and incapacity for love

General poverty in major affective reactions
Specific loss of insight
Unresponsiveness in general interpersonal relations
Fantastic and uninviting behavior with drink and sometimes without
Suicide threats rarely carried out
Sex life impersonal, trivial, and poorly integrated
Failure to follow any life plan (338-339)

After claiming that Cleckley's list could support such a vast array of different interpretations that it was necessary to use supporting evidence to conclude a diagnosis, even though there were no empirical data to do so (Hare and Neumann 217-246), Robert D. Hare used these sixteen items to create the PCL-R (Psychopathy Checklist Revised). However, he removed the core elements regarding irrational thinking and anxiety, and added new defining features like juvenile delinquency, impulsiveness, and grandiosity. The last two have since become key in the popular definition of psychopathy (Cameron 87-94). Hare also provided terminological differences between psychopathy and sociopathy (Hare 181-187), with the former having a physiological origin, and the latter being caused by environmental factors. This is the difference most commonly touted and used by the non-medical community nowadays. Likewise, Hare's depictions of psychopathy are the closest to what the actual myth of psychopathy in society stands for, with a focus on superficial charm, lack of remorse, pathological lying, lack of empathy, violence, impulsivity, or being manipulative.

Cleckley's and Hare's are the definitions which have most influenced the public perception of what psychopaths and sociopaths are, and which most have fed into their myths, to the point that, even eighty years after the publication of *The Mask of Sanity*, the social concept of psychopathy is still far closer to what they defined than to what the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual 5* defines as Antisocial Personality Disorder (2013). The *DSM*, if largely irrelevant in its first version of 1952 and its iteration of 1968, has since become, along with WHO ICD-10, the foremost tool in psychiatric diagnosis. It does away with the traditional differences between psychopathy and sociopathy, however, since it focuses on superficial symptoms and signs of mental disorders to try to improve diagnostic reliability. In *DSM-5*, the checklist for Antisocial Personality Disorder is shortened to just seven items:

1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest
2. Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure
3. Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead
4. Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults
5. Reckless disregard for safety of self or others
6. Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations
7. Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another (*DSM-5*, 659)

As seen here, not only does the mythological concept of psychopathy stray far from the actual medical diagnosis, but also it hardly applies to Arthur Fleck. Whether he be analyzed and compared to Cleckley's sixteen, Hare's twenty, or *DSM* seven diagnostic criteria, it is difficult to conclude that Arthur Fleck is a psychopath. He definitely is not portrayed as a charming character, and he suffers psychotic outbreaks. He

is a sincere and well-meaning person, and only once does he tell a white lie, to avoid being laid off. He tries to reach out to others several times in the film. He is selfless, lacks any kind of sexual life, and is shown to feel remorse over his actions. Arthur Fleck definitely suffers some mental disorder; not only does he regularly attend a psychologist, but it is also mentioned that he had been previously in a mental hospital. Finally, the hallucinations he suffers during his psychotic episodes are solid evidence of a mental disorder. But what exactly is Arthur Fleck's problem? He is depicted as a loner who struggles relentlessly to find meaning in his life and has his intentions and goals go unfulfilled over and over, like a modern Sisyphus, always pushing a boulder uphill. But what can Sisyphus do without a hill?

In 1942,[41] French philosopher Albert Camus published his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he introduced the philosophy of the absurd, a concept whereby modern individuals are forced to seek meaning in a world devoid of values, truth, or specific purpose. Camus, unlike his existentialist predecessors like Heidegger or Kierkegaard, warns the reader against making a leap of faith, an attempt to reconcile the world with human existence. Precisely, as Camus claimed, that attempt was the origin of the absurd; he said that it was the individual's "appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle" (6) which, in turn, leads to the realization of life's meaninglessness and purposelessness. This thought leads many to think that suicide is the only viable escape. Nevertheless, Camus maintained that that idea was a non-sequitur, for without the individual, the absurd cannot exist. Therefore, the struggle continues after the individual realizes the absurd of their existence. Thenceforth, "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land" (Camus 2), and yet, the individual can finally feel liberated. It is only when one realizes and embraces the meaninglessness and purposelessness that one emerges a free individual:

Arthur Fleck's existence is not marked as much by psychopathy or antisocial personality disorder as it is by his childhood traumas and inability to find a place for himself in the world, and by his struggle to undergo a process of psychological individuation, while trying at the same time to fit in society. It will be his need for an identity in a world which cannot accept his that will become his absurd. He reaches out to people, but they remain silent and unmoved. "The absurd,"—as Camus says—"is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (10).

Arthur Fleck—the Object and the Real: Need

Arthur Fleck is presented at the beginning of the film as a passive, bitter, and tense character; things *happen* to him, but hardly ever does he act to effect, prevent, or resolve those scenarios. He can be witnessed to helplessly take a beating on the street while protecting his genitalia, be offered a gun by Randall, be threatened by Hoyt Vaughn, or be interviewed and subsequently ignored by his therapist. He is depicted slowly dragging his feet up a long flight of stairs, symbolic of his daily struggle to fit in: his Sisyphean task. His mental energy—his *libido*—is constantly bubbling over, with the only possible release of his nervous laughter when he feels anxious.[42] He is, still, in the Real phase. This psychoanalytical stage is marked by *need*: he needs to fit in society, he needs to find his identity, he needs his mother, and he needs to realize himself. Fleck, however, lives in a state of anomie where he cannot know the limits of his desires (Harriford and Thompson 163). He cannot fit in society because his values are ultimately diametrically opposed to those of the people around him. Whereas he believes himself to have been "put

[41] The book was published in French. This article uses the 1991 version.

[42] It must be noted that, in the film, Arthur Fleck's laughter is a result of Pseudobulbar Affect as described by Frances L. Dark et al. in "Pathological Laughing and Crying" (1996), and not just a personality trait of his cheery nature.

here to spread joy and laughter," he is surrounded by self-centered and cold people who cannot understand his plight.

In order to continue with his psychosexual developmental process, Arthur Fleck would need to follow the traditional steps of the psychoanalytical individuation process. He, however, still lives in an Oedipal relationship with his mother. The complete absence of a father—as he says in Murray Franklin's talk show "I've been the man of the house for as long as I can remember. I take good care of my mother"— puts him in an unrealized stage where he cannot fully finish his Oedipus complex phase: "if the father is not available to play his role at this time (during the development of the Oedipus complex), there will be inadequate resolution of the conflict" (Leichty 212-217). Indeed, Fleck never faces any repression for his Oedipal desires, and is never therefore forced to give up on her attention. He is depicted in the film as a grown-up man who sleeps with his mother and bathes her in spite of her being completely able to do so herself. His Oedipal complex phase, thus, is never fully resolved. At the same time, Fleck also yearns for a father figure: his deluded vision of Murray Franklin's talk show, or his attempt to contact Thomas Wayne are evidence of his desperate longing. Throughout the film, there are several father figures; all of which will ultimately reject him.

> *Randall: his workmate, who offers Fleck masculine caring and a psychoanalytical phallus in the form of a handgun, right before saying "Nobody has to know…You know you're my boy." Even at that point, however and even if Fleck has not finished his Oedipal phase, he is aware of the Name-of-the-Father,[43] since he is a fully socialized citizen, which will ultimately allow him to enter a community, the Symbolic.[44] Randall, however, ends up betraying him and selling him out to Hoyt, claiming that Fleck "had tried to buy his .38 off him last week." Of course, Randall does that not out of spite or hate but to save himself, but it is still a serious blow to Fleck's psychosexual process and trust. "Randall said that?"—he answers after Hoyt informs him—, signaling the unexpected aspect of this betrayal.
>
> *Murray Franklin: the talk show host first presented when Fleck goes back home to his mother, when he suffers what could either be the first psychotic episode of the film, or just daydreaming. In it, Fleck fantasizes that he meets Murray at his show, and he grants him the recognition that he so craves "Well, there's something special about you, Arthur, I could tell… But, you know, this stuff, the lights, the show, the audience, all that stuff, I'd give it all up in a heartbeat to have a kid like you." The film eventually shows us a harsher reality: the first time that Fleck realizes that Murray is aware of his existence occurs because his stand-up performance is mocked and humiliated in the talk show.
>
> * Thomas Wayne: if there is a difference between Wayne and the other symbolic fathers, is that Fleck believes Wayne to be his actual biological father for a good part of the film. This could have helped him resolve his Oedipal complex phase to thus evolve into the Symbolic Order, and he even fights to draw his mother's attention away from Wayne, attempting to stop her from writing him

[43] The Name of the Father is a concept that Jacques Lacan developed to inform his psychosexual development. Lacan made a play on words with the French *le nom du père* and *le non du père* (the name of the father and the no of the father), to signify the rules by which everybody learns to abide during their psychosexual process. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this is represented by the Father because it is the first contact that we have as individuals with the imposition of the Law and the regulation of Desire, since the Symbolic Father is ultimately what introduces a necessary distance between a blooming Subject and its symbolic Mother.

[44] Likewise, the Symbolic is an Order that the blooming Subject can enter once they have accepted the Name of the Father, or the law that regulates desire and the rules of communication. Arthur Fleck is a law-abiding citizen until he has a problem with his unrealized identity, and is, therefore, part of the Symbolic order.

> more letters. Eventually, however, Fleck only faces a Cain and Abel situation, wherein he is the cast-out child while Bruce Wayne is able to live a normal life and have a family. When confronted and asked for some fatherly love—"I don't know why everyone is so rude, I don't know why you are; I don't want anything from you. Maybe a little warmth, maybe a hug, dad, maybe a bit of common decency!"—Thomas Wayne simply punches him in the face and threatens to kill him. He does not find out that he, too, is a false father figure until right before his breakdown.

Therefore, Arthur Fleck only has false father figures. Likewise, he eventually finds out that his mother is also an adoptive one, which sends him even further down into despair. His individuation process, then, cannot exactly follow the canonical psychosexual stages. How can Arthur Fleck, then, undergo his individuation process and find his identity?

Happy: The Subject and the Imaginary Order. Demand

As mentioned before, Arthur Fleck is a deeply conflicted character. He scorns his existence as a passive, disenfranchised individual struggling to fit in. He is trapped in a downward spiral of trying and never making it. He can find no support or consolation in his peers, mother, or even his therapist, of whom he asks for more drugs because he "doesn't want to feel so bad anymore." Similarly, and as seen above, he cannot simply realize his identity through the fear of castration, the rejection of the mother, and the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, laws and conventions. Fleck, however, due to his job, also has a sort of "alternative personality." The job, which he claims to love when speaking on the phone with Hoyt, allows him to live a different reality where he fulfils what he believes to be his purpose in society: "spread joy and laughter" to the world. Precisely, this personality, represented by the name that his mother gives him, "Happy," is symbolically a perfect characterization of the next stage that Arthur needs to enter: he sees what he wants to become several times in the film, when looking at himself in the mirror, preparing for a performance. Indeed, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage presents a dyadic relation between the self and the object one wants to make a part of oneself. What we see in the mirror is both something that we hate—one hates that version of oneself because it is better—and something that we love—one wants to become that image—, thus creating a "primordial Discord" (Lacan 4). Not only does being a clown, or a stand-up comedian, allow Arthur to realize what he believes to be his purpose in life; it also grants him recognition from those around him. As Hans Bertens explains, "we need the response and recognition of others … to arrive at what we experience as our identity" (135). Likewise, every time Arthur prepares for a performance, and dons his attire and make-up, he helps his individuation process through the mirror: "identity is constituted in interaction with what is outside of us and reflects us, it is relational—a notion that introduces the idea of difference into the process of identity construction" (Bertens 135). Again, the mirror helps him undergo the process of identifying who he is—Arthur Fleck, the Object—and who he wants to become—Happy, the Subject—a free individual, an "Ideal Ego," with the power to act.

This adoption of his alternate personality allows him to, in a way, bypass his Oedipus complex phase. Laden with the weight of his self-hatred, he can pretend to be somebody else, Happy; he "puts on a mask," and "his mask is that of robust mental health. Yet he has a disorder that often manifests itself in conduct" (Cleckley 398). Now a subject, and having been provided with the phallus—both the handgun and his power to act—he sets sails on the next logical step: the cathexis of finding a love object. Cathexis, the psychoanalytical term for the natural process of an investment of libido or mental energy into somebody (Laplanche and Pontalis 62-65), is a normal and necessary step in psychosexual development. However, Arthur, even when donning the "Happy mask," still struggles to socialize, and thus has to resort—just like with his longing for a father figure—to delusions, to avoid the pain of his extreme loneliness. Thus, his brain tricks him into believing that he has managed to build some rapport with Sophie Dumond, the single

mother living in his building. His desires can be seen through that psychotic hallucination: it can be seen how Arthur, when deluded, is always seeking recognition—Sophie assures him that he is funny, something that his own mother had expressed her doubts about, and Murray tells him he is an ideal son—, and that recognition will play a vital part in his identity development later on.

As mentioned before, Arthur is also able to keep progressing due to being given—he is, after all, an Object—the phallus. Aware of the Name-of-the-Father, the laws and social structures around him, he tells Randall "I'm not supposed to have a gun." However, once he is back home, the first dance scene takes place: Arthur appears relaxed, dancing bare-chested in his lounge with the gun in his hand. His soliloquy, of a narcissistic nature—another characteristic of the mirror stage—represents his imaginary conversation with a person who is complimenting his dancing skills. Arthur can be seen in a relaxed state here for the first time, in contraposition to some other dance scenes. However, the scene is also a grim reminder of his fear of castration; when accidentally shooting the gun, he becomes anxious and revolted, and quickly tries to make excuses for the noise to his mother. Conversely, the first time his phallus, or his new power, is seen out in the open—at the children's hospital—he receives the full punishment of the Name-of-the-Father and is fired. Just like after being beat up by the gang of kids or after being threatened by Hoyt, he is shown going back home. However, for the first time, he is not depicted slowly dragging his feet up the same flight of stairs. This time, he cannot release his mental energy—his *libido*—by pushing his proverbial boulder up a hill. This time, he gets back home on the subway. Saddened, angered, and with his mental energy threatening to bubble over, he is confronted about his nervous laughter by three Wall Street businessmen—one of whom takes his wig and mask, negating his adopted identity—who start beating him when he tries to reach into his bag for the card he uses to explain his condition. Soon, he is again depicted lying sideways on the floor while being kicked by the three men, a scene reminiscent of the beating at the beginning of the film. However, on this occasion, he already was in an anxious and highly cathectic state; there was a vast and latent emotional charge within him. Unable to release it in any other way, and having a handgun, he unleashes it in a destructive and negative way: his *libido* becomes *mortido*, an energy that activates "such forces as hate

and cruelty, blinding anger and social hostilities" (Berne 69) and has been described as "an instinct of destruction… parallel to the forces of *libido*" (Laplanche and Fletcher 34). Thus, not only does he kill two of the Wall Street men attacking him in the heat of the fight, but also, he hunts down the third one. Arthur Fleck encounters his Abject, Joker.

Joker: The Abject and… the Symbolic Order? Desire

Julia Kristeva defined the abject as something that draws one "toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). This meaning, Lacan's Symbolic Order, is generally facilitated by the existence of the *objet petit a*, the Object. The Object allows a Subject to realize their desires and thus enter the Symbolic and the intersubjective community. The Abject, on the other hand, exists in liminal spaces, outside of meaning and order, and represents our primal repression, what separates human from animal or society from its previous state. It is the part within the Self that "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). Especially, the Abject is that which breaks down the distinction between Subject and Object and thus destroys identity. A human corpse, particularly, shows our inevitable end, the true abjection:

> as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. (3-4)

Therefore, Fleck, in that moment of abjection—when order and identity are disturbed—faces Joker, his latent personality and Abject. Joker exists in a liminal space between Subject and Object: he has been forced to act, and in doing so, all primal repressions have been lifted. Arthur becomes the Abject, something between the Subject and the Object or between the Self and the Other.

At first, Fleck reacts with shock at what he has done, and flees the scene. Upon shutting himself in a public restroom, however, he starts dancing in front of the mirror. His movements are slow, controlled, and free-flowing. After turning around, he notices himself in the mirror: he is not Fleck, since he is wearing his mask. Once he has overcome his episode of wrath, he is Happy again, a Subject. He suffers another psychotic episode, therefore, where he acts: he fantasizes about going to Sophie Dumond's house to, presumably, engage in sexual intercourse. However, he also exists now in a liminal space: he rejects the Name-of-the-Father, as evidenced by his confronting Randall and punching the timestamp machine—a symbol of a control mechanism—, after saying "Oh no, I forgot to punch out." In spite of the situation, not only does he not laugh, but also, he can remain collected and joke about it. His encounter with his Abject has, in a way, liberated him.

His adopted identity, still Happy, witnesses Thomas Wayne on TV saying that only a coward "who hides behind a mask" could commit such a cold-blooded crime. As he says, he is one of those people that change for the better, those who "will always look at those who haven't, as nothing but clowns." Later on, and with his therapist, he confronts her for just asking questions and never really heeding him, really denying his identity. Fleck tells her "all I'm having are negative thoughts… for my whole life, I didn't know if I even really existed. But I do, and people are starting to notice." As an answer, he is told that due to budget cuts, he will not have access to his psychotropic medications or therapy anymore, and the therapist suggests it is a result of an 'us-versus-them' situation: "They don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur. And they don't really give a shit about people like me, either." This outright rejection of his epiphany and subsequent confession when he finally manages to accept his own identity and existence truncates his identification process. Since he still continues to live under his adopted identity of Happy, he suffers another hallucination: Sophie Dumond is there with him at his performance, listening to his stand-up act. Moreover, he finds out that his actual father is Thomas Wayne, thus strengthening his identity. Now he has a father figure and a mother figure, which allows him to undergo the traditional psychosexual development process towards his identity through renouncing his mother and identifying with his father, thus resolving his Oedipal stage. When he tries to contact Thomas Wayne, however, he has to face his identity-lacking reality again: Alfred Pennyworth tells him that Thomas Wayne is not his real father. After he insults his mother, Arthur momentarily resorts to violence again and tries to choke Alfred before realizing what he is doing and fleeing the scene.

With his identity now breaking apart, he goes back to the hospital to see his mother, who had a stroke when two police officers trying to investigate Fleck's crime tried to ask her some questions. He suffers yet another blow to his identity when he sees Murray on TV mocking and humiliating him for his stand-up performance. Fleck begins to realize that many of the *actions* he took as Happy, as a subject, were just delusions. At the same time, riots in the city start spreading, and those living in poverty, unemployment, and desperation, adopt Fleck's image because of the symbolism of his crime. Fleck, for once, gains real recognition. It is a short-lived stability, however, as he receives another blow when, confronting Thomas Wayne, not only is he told that he is not his father, but also Penny Fleck is not his mother. His identity, Happy, which had been given by her, crumbles down, and he becomes Fleck again. His nervous laughter comes back in full force before Wayne asks him if he thinks it is funny, punches him in the face, and threatens to kill him.

Back home, Fleck shuts himself in the fridge, like a cold, primordial womb, representing a regression in his psychosexual development after having been denied—no mother, no father—his identity. Now,

devoid of a mother, he seeks solace in a symbolic place representing one. He, however, is invited to Murray's talk show and gaining an identity through recognition becomes feasible; in fact, he does try to gain recognition for his crimes at Arkham hospital: he wants to confess. No longer in need of mother and father figures, he murders both Randall, his workmate, and his mother, while claiming "I used to think that my life was a tragedy, but now I realize, it's a comedy." This time, however, he does not feel forced to face his latent personality, Joker, and the attacks, more premeditated in nature, do not occur in the heat of the moment. He, at last, denies the identity he had "Fleck. I've always hated that name" and the personality he had been trying to adopt: "I haven't been Happy one minute in my entire fucking life." Free to adopt a different identity and undergo a different individuation process, he is depicted dancing and stomping his feet on the stairs again. This time, however, he is going downstairs; he no longer cares about what society expects of him, and abandons the fight to fit into a society which cannot recognize his values. During the police chase, too, he dons a mask he takes from another man on the train, adopting a new identity and symbolizing his adoption by a different segment of society, those living in a liminal space: the wandering, poor, unemployed, and wronged outcasts who are protesting against the government.

At the talk show, he finally meets in person his third and last father figure, Murray. Again, in front of a mirror that reads "put on a happy face," and confronted again by the Name-of-the-Father—he is made aware of the rules of the program regarding content—, there seems to exist a momentary glimmer of hope for his adoption of Happy, again. However, he says that he wants to be introduced as Joker—thus rejecting his identities of Arthur Fleck and Happy—and is seen to rehearse his public suicide again, which says otherwise about his intentions. Once onstage, and after being asked to show the audience some of his material by Murray, he is relentlessly mocked by him; mocked for having a joke journal, for taking longer than he would like, and for his use of black comedy. Feeling rejected and attacked, he lashes out, confronting the audience and Murray about their Manichean, self-righteous view of the world, and their hypocritical ways. Having long sought it, he finally confesses his crimes live on TV: with the recognition that he so craves, comes identity and a sense of belonging. He becomes a symbol and an idol to those who want to attack the rich. Joker hints at the true origin of his identity, born from years of systematic social abuse and rejection, "They think that we'll just sit there and take it like good little boys. That we won't werewolf and go wild!" before also murdering Murray Franklin, claiming that it is what society deserves and it is what they get when they cross "a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash." After being arrested and taken away, he is liberated by the rioting mob. Standing on the police car, he uses his own blood to paint a wide smile on his face while dancing on the car. Finally, for Fleck—now Joker—, the identity and sense of belonging that he had sought for his entire life comes through the same blood and pain he has endured trying to fit in. This time, however, it is other people's pain and blood.

Conclusions

As Bertens claims, "identity is constituted in interaction with what is outside of us and reflects us, it is relational—a notion that introduces the idea of difference into the process of identity construction" (135); Arthur Fleck, therefore, needs to interact with those around him to build his identity. Unable to undergo the traditional process explained by psychoanalysis, he needs indeed to construct his identity with "the idea of difference," and this makes it impossible for him to truly become a Subject. When compared to most of society, to thus define himself, he is seen as a freak, an outcast, and is alienated by others. When adopted by other outcasts, those living in a liminal space of society, he finally fits in, but cannot build an identity through a process of differentiation from the rest. Fleck, therefore, ends up as Joker, his Abject and latent personality. Being neither Object nor Subject, he also exists in a liminal space where he acts

when forced to, but has no real autonomy. He has an inherent and deep-rooted drive to manifest his Joker personality, and he is forced by society to act out Joker's fickle, impulsive, and erratic force of *mortido*, due to his inability to focus his *libido* on a Lacanian *objet petit a*, since he is not a Subject either.

Regarding the Joker's identity, it is necessary and indeed highly enlightening to comment on the choices regarding it that were made for this film, for they have effectively changed his identity—as if conscious of the possible backlash they could expect, if they had attempted to build upon a previously established canonical Joker—by changing the original Jack Rapier to Arthur Fleck. However, many other changes have been effected by the gradual shift in our social concept of madness as society. Originally—as in the most often cited origin[45]—a lab technician gone stand-up comedian to help his wife, Allan Moore's Joker only goes insane due to the pain after jumping into a vat full of chemicals that horribly disfigure him and losing his wife and child. And even then, at the beginning, the Joker was—if still a criminal—mostly harmless in what respects to his madness. It was only in the 1970s that they revisited him as a ruthless psychopath, far from the comic relief character he had been since his creation, as explained by Alex Cohen in "The Joker: Torn between Goof and Evil." The fact that Phillips has been the first author to create a Joker who already suffered from mental disorders long before his rebirth is truly noteworthy, as is the fact that Arthur Fleck suffers from real life disorders. Whereas in the comic he was always portrayed as crazy for his sick sense of humor, outbursts, and fits of laughter, he had never been portrayed as having any specific disorder. In Phillips' film, however, it is hinted that Arthur Fleck is in treatment for his depression—he mentions his recurring and dark, sad thoughts to his therapist several times—and schizophrenia—as hinted in the several hallucinations throughout the film—in addition to suffering from the Pseudobulbar affect. It is reasonable to argue that Phillips intention was to create a film about the state of public mental health services and how the funding cuts pose a risk to the most vulnerable at a time when mental health awareness is much more popular than in the 1950s, when the character was created, but it also continues a long tradition of Hollywood films that simplify psychopathologies. From a Pseudobulbar Affect which only includes fits of laughter and not crying, and which actually occurs at moments of extreme stress, to help viewers empathize with the character to incredibly long-lasting hallucinations and delusions, *Joker* drives powerful points about current social problems, but also continues the habit of Hollywood films of not adequately framing the narrative with actual disorders. Phillips, in fact, told Phoenix simply that his character was supposed to "be off," as revealed in an interview (Rottenbeg, 2019), claiming that they did not want Phoenix to study about the alleged illnesses that his character suffers from. Later in the film, moreover, it is revealed he might not suffer those disorders from trauma derived from some dramatic and grandiose event, but from a brain injury after sustaining physical abuse, and that he is simply another casualty, yet another number in a system that simply does no longer care. It shows how the difference between a good man and an instigator can be a bad day in a life that makes no sense. And Arthur Fleck's life does indeed make no sense—as reflected by his joke "I hope my death makes more cents than my life"—and the only way that he can find to act out his will when forced to is to disseminate the chaos and anarchy that represent his life, devoid of all meaning. Indeed, like a modern Sisyphus, Arthur Fleck, considers suicide, aware of the absurd of his existence. However, just like Camus predicted, he rejects the idea: "I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I cannot know that meaning… I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone" (54). Fleck is determined to keep fighting, both to fit in and to seek truth. When forced to move onto a liminal space where he can embrace a different personality, Joker,

[45] It must be noted that none of the Joker's origins are truly established as canonical, and he himself stated in *The Killing Joke* (Moore and Bolland, 1988, pp. 38-40) "I'm not exactly sure what it was. Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another ... if I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice," something that has given many different authors a chance to explore their creativity while coming up with new origins for the villain.

chaos and anarchy become crucial to delimit truth. Where Fleck was an absurdist, Joker is a nihilist: he understands that social values have long disappeared and rejects the fight to fit in. By doing so, ironically, he finally fits in, if only with other outcasts. Unable to become a subject and to form his identity, he becomes Joker, an Abject living in a liminal space of the Symbolic Order, and embraced by outcasts living in a liminal space of society. He embarks in a katabasis, dancing down the stairs and unable to keep fighting for a meaningless society, and this sort of anti-hero's journey allows him to emerge from the other side, renewed and liberated. As Camus claims:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (111)

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Gender, Genre, and Thematic Expectation in Logan Thomas' *The Yellow Wallpaper*: How Filmmakers Can Use Palimpsest Against the Audience

Abstract: In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon posits that adaptations give audiences the best of both worlds: something familiar and recognizable while also presenting something new and unexpected. Media makers can play on audiences' expectations, creating a "palimpsestuous" relationship between the original and adaptive texts. Director Logan Thomas depends on his audience's prior engagement with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" in his 2012 film of the same name. While the film is a clear departure from Gilman's text, acting as the origin story of the author's experience in writing the story, Thomas' reliance on the viewers' familiarity with Gilman is necessary to his larger trans-genre project. Thomas expects that his viewers will expect Gilman's gothic setting, tone, and language and delivers those expectations for much of the film. This palimpsest of genre expectation however becomes a perfect way for him to enhance audience fear when the film turns out to be a horror. Thomas' technique of using the palimpsest against the audience changes his adaptation of a text from one genre to another, revealing the shock that can be garnered from working with popular canonical texts.

Keywords: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Logan Thomas, genre, adaptation theory, palimpsest

Introduction

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon outlines the operating factors and ramifications of adaptations, enlightening media-literate readers as to the sociological motivations behind cross-medium adaptations. Early on, she discusses the functional principle of the palimpsest that connects audience members to adaptive works via their experiences with and prior knowledge of original texts. According to Hutcheon, adaptive texts are "haunted at all times by their adapted texts" (6). In *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (2010), Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan further complicate the relationship between the adaptive and the adapted in stating, "One of the seductions of adaptation criticism is that the literary text will not disappear, and its traces (often obscured or unacknowledged) come to the surface in numerous ways, just as adaptation, particularly a successful one, inhabits and imprints itself upon the notational original" (12). For the new work to function as an adaptation and enter into conversation with the adapted original, the audience must be aware of the original text. Without a preexisting relationship with the original text, the audience may still enjoy a new work but will miss the elements that "[stress] the relation of individual works to other works and to an entire cultural system" (Hutcheon 21). Hutcheon claims that adaptations are so popular due to palimpsestuous familiarity; a successful adaptation works well when it is both familiar to the audience and able to offer something new. Given this broad definition of success, Logan Thomas' 2012 film adaptation works as a reimagining of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." The film of the same name has foundations in Gilman's text in setting and extremely basic plot elements but shifts genre from Gilman's Gothic at a key moment. In fact, the film should be considered less of a successful adaptation and more of an intertextual origin story as Thomas' narrative follows Gilman herself as she writes her canonical story in the type of gothic "colonial mansion"

that serves as the setting for her short story (334). According to Geoffrey Wagner's three-tiered scale of adaptations' faithfulness to source texts found in *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), Logan's film exemplifies the loosest category of fidelity, an "analogy," by presenting a substantially different narrative from Gilman's story. However, incorporating enough familiar material into his film makes Thomas' sudden shift in genre toward the film's end much more shocking, a directorial choice that serves as an example of how theoretical notions of the palimpsest can favor media makers who work with popular texts. Additionally, Thomas uses the genre shift to complicate Gilman's discussion of gender politics.

Methodology

This article situates Gilman's original text firmly within a genre and historical context. From Gilman's Gothic and fin de siècle timing, specifically female tensions of being pressured by and attempting to press back against patriarchal rules emerge. Relying on adaptation theory and a feminist critical lens, a male auteur (Thomas is the film's director, producer, and co-writer) film maker's revisioning of Gilman's text is explored for adaptive purpose, generic adherences, and thematic shift. The film moves away from the Gothic in a manner that shocks the audience because of both their palimpsestuous relationship with the source text and Thomas' misleading adherence to the Gothic in the film's opening. However, film history and theory can illuminate Thomas' techniques as his Gothic and Horror elements recall the gendered implications of those genres and what they can mean for his original thematic statement on gender in the twenty-first century.

Gilman's Famous Gothic Story and Its Feminist Interpretations

The popularity of the source text works in Thomas' favor; "The Yellow Wallpaper" is typical fare in high school literary studies. Published in 1892, Gilman's frequently anthologized short story follows the first-person narrative via the diary of a woman, an unnamed everywoman, isolated in an unfamiliar house while being treated for various psychoses by her doctor husband. Part of the audiences' unease comes from questionable narrator credibility. A new mother, the character labels her illness a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (334), but she may actually be ignoring personal symptoms of what we now call postpartum depression (PPD). While PPD was not listed as an official diagnosis until 1994 in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM), it has been commonly alluded to throughout history beginning with Hippocrates' awareness of depressive symptoms common in women after giving birth (Sparks 3). She might also be under a significant amount of stress caused by treatment—with or without reason—administered by her husband, a mental health professional.[46] Her husband serves as a caricature of Victorian patriarchal control (Hume 478), "prescribing that [which keeps] the narrator infantilized, immobilized, and bored literally out of her mind" (Lanser 418). Whether or not readers choose to trust the narrator, they can feel her sense of unease amplified by being contained at her husband's whim without any creative outlet in a room designated for use by children. Most of the narrator's worry stems from her placement in this space; the room has creepy, fetid wallpaper that may or may not have a woman trapped behind its complex pattern. Many other classic elements of the Gothic genre appear in Gilman's story.

The genre itself is notably difficult to define. Suzanne Rintoul's essay "Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition" (2005) confronts this issue by examining the variations in definitions provided by contemporary scholars and educators. Rintoul finds that engagement with this problem of classification yields two types of results: critics either "attempt to cover several aspects of the Gothic in order to define

[46] The narrator sees this possibility while acknowledging the fact that she is not well: "John is a physician, and perhaps… that is one reason I do not get well sooner" (334).

it in its most expansive sense" or perform "more focused studies of individual works that situate a definition of the genre along a historical, cultural, and political continuum" (702). As these studies produce definitions that are either too broad or too narrow to be of consistent use, it is perhaps better to define the genre through consistently employed conventions. After all, the Gothic tends toward a "thematic emphasis on the impossibility of securing limits" (702). "The anxieties thematized in the Gothic are so spectral, so indecipherable and sublimely broad" as to cover many socio-cultural anxieties as they change from place-to-place and throughout time (701). Most scholars agree that the Gothic functions as a genre by indirectly confronting social concerns over issues such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. As Jerrold E. Hogle states: "the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural" (4).

It does so by supporting a number of conventions, many of which Gilman makes use. Gothic fiction often confronts "the fear of one being exerting total power over another" (Seed 271). It also "usually takes place… in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space" that conceals "some secrets from the past… that haunt the characters" (Hogle 2). Hauntings appear frequently as "ghosts, specters, or monsters (mixing features from different realms of being, often life and death)" that make the Gothic text a common site for exploring the relationship "between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural" (Hogle 2). Furthermore, authors who create a first-person point of entry into distressing places and situations often do so in order to play upon reader emotions: "authors of Gothic heroes frequently presented themselves as heroes through narrative and editorial strategies" (Rintoul 708). Strategies like the first-person point of view make the plot seem more real by legitimating the author's supposed experiences while also positioning the reader in the place of the "I" who experiences the trauma of those experiences. Gilman troublingly employs the first person in a tale that actually is semiautobiographical; she famously endured treatment for depression after childbirth. Her tale is set in "ancestral halls" that the narrator is tempted to call "a haunted house" (334). She herself is haunted by the specter of the woman in the wallpaper, a physical manifestation of her being haunted by her illness and/or her paternalistic husband who has complete control over her every facet of life.

The Gothic genre has always been of significant use to female writers and readers. Horace Walpole is credited for introducing the literary Gothic with the 1764 release of *The Castle of Otranto*. The genre received sporadic use for several decades before "it exploded in the 1790s… throughout the British Isles, on the continent of Europe, and briefly in the new United States, particularly for a female readership" (Hogle 1). Anne Radcliffe, "the most popular English woman novelist of the 1790s" and poster child for the genre, and her contemporaries "[developed] the primal Gothic scene of a woman confined and [turned] it into a journey of women coming into some power and property by their own and other feminine agency, albeit within a still-antiquated and male-dominated world full of terrors for every female" (Hogle 10). Hogle notes the frequency with which the genre's texts center around a female character who unearths some secret from within the physical expression of western patriarchal lineages: the large, ancestral estate. Contemporary critics confront the troubling reoccurrence with which Gothic "women are the figures most fearfully trapped between contradictory pressures and impulses" (Hogle 9). Increasingly, feminist critics examine "how female protagonists can represent women's empowerment when such empowerment is predicated on their roles as victims" (Rintoul 709). Michelle Masséde problematizes this feminist conflict by stating "that subversion in the Gothic depends on the illusion of submission. For Massé, the submissive Gothic heroine subverts by quietly masking her disobedience of the patriarchy that oppresses her" (Massé qtd. in Rintoul 709). Indeed, "[t]he Victorian wife had so little control over her own life that it was through [the] 'frivolities' such as clothing and even wallpaper that these women exercised their autonomy" (Crowder). It is therefore no surprise that the narrator finds an outlet for her rebellion

and anger in the wallpaper hung in her nursery prison; not only were Victorian women reduced to minor means of exerting autonomy, but they were also expected to be obedient wives and doting mothers, proverbial angels of the house, regardless of their ambitions or desires. Gilman's heroine exemplifies Victorian subversion; she notes the pains she takes "to control [herself]—before [John], at least" (335). Gilman's heroine performs submission by feigning sleep, concealing the document she is writing, and hiding her attempts to uncover the mystery of the wallpaper.

Despite the Gothic's and Gilman's reliance on an active rather than reactive female protagonist, there is some scholarly debate as to whether "The Yellow Wallpaper" is meant to be a feminist text. Originally interpreted as a ghost story akin to Poe's canon, feminist criticism opened up the possibility that Gilman was making claims about male authority in her text. Given her experiences as a female patient in masculine mental health settings, her failed first marriage, her nervous breakdown following her daughter's birth, and her active participation in the suffrage movement, labeling her text a woman-centered one that comments on the restricted place granted to women in patriarchal systems is unproblematic. In a short article entitled "Why I wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" originally published in 1913 in Gilman's magazine, *The Forerunner*, Gilman herself discloses her authorial intensions. Having suffered from "a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia," she sought out treatment from a specialist. "The wise man" prescribed a "rest cure," telling her to "'live as domestic a life as far as possible,'" to limit herself to two hours of intellectual work a day, and "never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again" in her life. After three months of further progression toward "utter mental ruin," she began to work, "in which is joy and growth and service." She goes on to mention that the specialist later amended his treatment protocols and mentions awareness of at least one woman who was spared from "a similar fate" ("Why I Wrote…" 348-349). "The Yellow Wallpaper" has a rightful place in feminist anthologies, where it is very often republished, and should be taught as a criticism of fin de siècle gender politics, which it very often is. Additionally, Gilman notably wrote Herland, a short novel about a productive utopian society comprised entirely of women that is intruded upon by male explorers, a more overt treatment of gender hierarchy. The feminist critical view of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is so prevalent that Logan Thomas relies on viewers of his film having knowledge of the text's recognition among its vast readership as a commentary on women's limited agency as wives, mothers, and patients although the term "feminism" would have been unfamiliar to Gilman's contemporary audience.

Thomas' Adaptive Generic and Thematic Changes

On its surface, Thomas' 2012 film does not appear to be making a specific assertion about gender equity due in part to its departure from Gilman's plot. Instead of focusing on the narrative voice of a woman dominated by her husband, Dr. John Weiland (Aric Cushing)[47] provides a male perspective through voice over. The film opens in 1892 with a shot of Charlotte's (Juliet Landau) back, a further signal that this adaptation will not foreground female experiences as Gilman's adapted text does. Rather, Thomas' work follows the Weilands as a couple along with Charlotte's sister Jennie (Dale Dickey). The group settles into an eerie rental home in a faraway town after receiving a letter from realtor Isaac Hendricks (Michael Moriarty) when a fire destroys their familial home and kills their daughter. The house seems to carry some stigma in the community as various locals comment on their wellbeing, a line of inquiry that only exacerbates their shared distress. John's misogynistic mentor and former professor Dr. Jack Everland (Raymond J. Barry) visits him and guides John through his grief over the loss of his daughter, Sarah.

[47] Interestingly, Cushing has published a collection of Gilman's work entitled *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories: The Complete Gothic Collection*. His introductory essay, "Is 'The Yellow Wallpaper' a Gothic Story?" highlights Gilman's career as a Gothic writer.

Charlotte and Jennie also receive visitors, local women who attempt to befriend them. The women are snubbed and dismissed as Charlotte turns her focus on family and devastating loss inward and begins writing "The Yellow Wallpaper." She works from the attic where she cloisters herself after having visions of Sarah in the house. Jennie leaves the house after a number of unexplainable events and heads "back East." John alone supports Charlotte, and the film briefly becomes a romance as the couple reconnects. Charlotte produces her story and regains her grasp on sanity, seeming to come to terms with her daughter's death through artistic effort. Jennie returns with her former college friend, psychic Catherine Sayer (Veronica Cartwright). John is as dismissive of Catherine's supernatural abilities as he is about her thoughts on "secular rights and the modern woman." Catherine feels the house "calling for" John to search under the house where he finds Sarah. The family has a short-lived reunion before Sarah becomes a man who threatens them all with hell, pointing specifically at Charlotte. John determines that they will leave the house in the morning. When morning comes, he sets out to town even though Catherine has mysteriously disappeared, leaving Jennie and Charlotte behind. He demands that the women do not go back into the house, but after finding Catherine's body in an unearthed coffin and being threatened by wild dogs, they have no other course of action. Meanwhile John is confronted by a man dressed as a Greco-Roman sentry, a bizarre experience that leads him back to the house where Charlotte and Jennie have somehow been separated. John returns to find a blood-covered shawl, the first sign that viewers have been engaging with a horror movie all along. Eckhart van Wakefield (Pieter Kloos), the home's ancestral owner, appears as a centuries-old vampire who has been preying on renters found by Mr. Hendricks. Wakefield feeds on John, leaving him alive to find Charlotte's body. Hendricks reenters to tell John that Charlotte has been turned into a vampire. John must choose between leaving Charlotte to die, an action that would cause him to die of reasons that go unexplained, and finding people to serve as her food source. He chooses the later, and the film ends with him inviting a husband and his pregnant wife into the home. The final frame depicts John wearing contemporary clothing leaning against the "hideous, …unreliable, …and infuriating" wallpaper (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 340).

In this departure, Thomas' work seems to step away from the feminist critical readings of Gilman. While her text highlights interiority and autonomy, Logan highlights breaking down boundaries: in time (ancient Mediterranean past and Victorian presence), insiders and outsiders (townspeople and the incoming Weilands), the normal and paranormal, and—of course—genres and genders. In fact, this film is as much about gender and gendered relationships as the story from which it purportedly originates. On its surface, the film seems to offer as many anti-feminist as it does feminist stances. An easy explanation of this would be that the film is largely the product of two men: Logan Thomas and Aric Cushing. John has supplanted the voice of Gilman's first-person female character. Truly, the two lead female characters are silent through the first several minutes of the film. During one of their extended conversations, they refer to their neighborhood visitors as an ignorant "flock of chickens." They balk and chide John when he talks down to Jennie, snapping at her as she tries to translate a document written in French and constantly commenting on what he refers to as her overreactions. While sometimes brusque, John is not the proud doctor of the short story. He claims that, despite his medical training, he is willing to do physical labor. It is hard to imagine Gilman's Dr. John doing so to support his family. Chauvinistic Jack, John's former professor, insists that a woman's need for a child trumps all other desires in her life, for "what else does a woman have if not the joy of creation?" It is clear that he does not consider artistic creation as a possible meaningful occupation for a woman. The short but crucial portrayal of Jack—during which he offers psychological counseling to John—questions patriarchal medical and gendered practices while reinforcing the concept of a paternalistic dynamic between doctors and their patients, between men and women. John refers to Sarah as "my baby," an emotional claim over a child that has usually been socially reserved for mothers while men were expected to stoically view their children and wives as physical property. John

refuses indifference, crying in bed over the grief of losing Sarah and the frustration of his current living situation. However, challenging gendered perceptions of emotionality are not enough to warrant labeling the film a feminist text as Gilman's story is. While the Jennie of the film does mention her lack of options as an older, unmarried, well-educated[48] woman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* cannot be said to be "about" these issues.

There does not seem to be evidence enough for one cohesive stance on gender relations or the options available to women sustained throughout the plot, a perceivable absence for audiences familiar with Gilman. Feminist critics highlight the limited agency of the Gilman's nameless narrator at the controlling hands of her doctor/husband as he instills in her the very anxiety he laughably claims to be treating. Gilman's many unseen but mentioned female players are also worthy of note. Jennie figures into the action, but "Mary" and "Jane" are apparitional figures whose absence forms part of the justification for feminist readings of Gilman and furthermore make the reader question the narrator's sanity. Contrarily, Thomas' Charlotte and Jennie carry a great deal of the action despite not voicing their inner thoughts one-on-one with viewers as John does. With the ghosts of Gilman's text lingering on viewers' mental parchment, Thomas' filmic text may be read as taking advantage of the palimpsest to skirt expectations of an overt statement on hierarchical social relationships. Thomas' genre shift serves to conceal his message on gender politics.

The shift in genre may seem abrupt for viewers. Throughout the film, Gothic elements provide a sense of unease that culminates in the bloody image that signals the genre shift. The soundtrack is filled with dissonant chords and the loud pounding of a heartbeat. The possibly haunted house is situated next to a cemetery, is full of dust, contains a mysterious portrait, is infested with rats, and has clearly inspired some mythic status among the surrounding community. The film incorporates these elements to build a growing sense of discomfort among viewers. Establishing shots of gothic settings are juxtaposed with tighter shots of characters lost in the discomforting spaces. In one sequence, John awakes to strange noises and sees an unknown man in the house. Shirtless, he lights a candelabra and searches the house. Situated in the center of the dimly lit frame in a medium shot, John walks away from the screen and looks up a staircase to his left. The music becomes increasingly shrill. The next scene shows him advancing up the stairs to the attic decorated with the titular wallpaper. The tension reaches its peak, but nothing happens. There is no confrontation with any spectral being. Instead, in the morning, the characters debate over realistic explanations and possible solutions; Charlotte suggests that a previous tenant may have returned for something, and they decide to start locking the doors at night. Anxiety is quickly built and easily dissipated in true Gothic fashion, an emotional ebb and flow consistent with readers' and viewers' prior experiences in the Gothic genre which are also firmly rooted in familiarity with Gilman's text.

Thomas' film departs from the Gothic by providing a real physical danger for the characters once the vampire plot is revealed. The Gothic provides a "blurring of the division between hallucination and reality" while horror derives its heightened sense of danger only from reality, from the very real possibility of death (Seed 272). Hogle "[suggests] that [the Gothic genre] might be best thought of as a 'symbolic realm,'" an apt recommendation as Gothic anxieties are produced with symbols and suggestions of vulnerability without forcing characters (and by extension the audience) to confront their mortality (Hogle qtd. in Rintoul 703). Hogle also hints at a generic family tree in which the Gothic acts as horror's ancestor. He uses the term "horror Gothic" to define texts that make characters encounter "the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms… of everyday life with wildly shocking,

[48] Jennie states "knowledge is not considered desirable in a woman." For all of her talk about her education, being educated seems not to afford her any career opportunities. She appears to be largely dependent on her married sister.

and even revolting, consequences" (Hogle 3). Both genres are definable by the emotional response they try to elicit in audiences. The Gothic hopes for unease and anxiety that will set teeth gnashing; going one step further, Horror hopes for terror over the possibility of blood spilling.

The film does hint at its shift to Horror in several ways. John is shown shaving with a straight razor at one point and cleaning a gun in another. These acts foreshadow the bloody conclusion of the plot but again by playing off viewers' expectation. John's use of the razor and gun suggests to viewers that—like for Gilman—the character of John will cause distress/death for the women in the house, an indictment of male authoritarianism. It further aligns him as an instrument of death, a tool that Charlotte will later rely on to feed her vampiric bloodlust. The casting offers additional hints as the actors' combined corpus includes many classic horror films. Landau performed in Ed Wood (1994), a biographical look at the infamous B Horror director. Dickey acted in *A Perfect Getaway* (2009). More worthy of note, Cartwright starred in countless made-for-television horror projects, *The Invasion* (2007), *Scary Movie 2* (2001), and most famously *The Birds* (1963). *The Yellow Wallpaper*'s female actors are especially affiliated with Horror, although this intertextual use of gender to symbolize genre should be expected given Horror's history.

Historical Uses of Genre and Twenty-first Century Gender Politics

Like the Gothic, women have had a notable place in the Horror genre. Like the Gothic's reliance on the anxieties produced by the idea of being under another's total control (a female reality through most of Western history), Horror is grounded in bodily vulnerability and exploitation. As rape, domestic violence, and partner murder are overwhelmingly female problems, Horror works well as a women's genre just as the Gothic has. In *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema: The Woman's Film, Film Noir, and Modern Horror* (2011), David Greven argues that the woman's film of the early twentieth century that centers on female characters' economic and social upward mobility later becomes the modern Horror genre "in which the trope of female transformation not only persists but really flourishes" (2). Of course, Charlotte's turn to vampirism is the horrific counterpoint to the transformative achievement of success as a writer despite being a woman during the turn of the century. Greven further notes that generically, the "horror film treats heterosexual union as a bond forged in hell, the result of violence, domination, and subjugation" (14). Throughout the film, John makes belittling comments to Jennie and Charlotte, but they are often returned. Thomas gives viewers no indication that John is physically abusing either woman. The trio do appear to function within a gender normative context. The women clean; he finds work outside the home. They sew; he kills rats. *The Yellow Wallpaper* does not depict repression of women, at least not to the extent that its adapted text does. Jennie acknowledges that her financial situation is bleak without marriage, but she has experienced personal growth and development through education. Charlotte thrives as a writer, partly due to her husband's encouragement. While the family do not adhere fully to the rigid gendered boundaries, outside social restrictions are made overt in characters' conversations and preoccupations as well as in its eventual turn toward Horror. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* "argues that the primary fear at the core of the horror film genre is that the subject will be reengulfed by the terrifying figure of the archaic mother, whose maw-like threat hovers around the cultural narratives… that repress her presence" (Creed qtd. in Greven 13). However, the film does not depict either woman or femininity itself as monstrous until suggesting Charlotte's off-screen vampire feedings. All three main characters experience the Gothic anxieties produced by the house and the vampire it houses. These anxieties are representative of the general apprehension felt by everyone in a society with strict gender boundaries defined by performing specific behaviors. John specifically feels these anxieties and tensions.

In making John the target character for the terror summoned by the film's turn to the Horror genre, Thomas makes his comment on gender although it is not one that viewers expect. The palimpsest of Gilman's confined and agentless woman, the film's use of Gothic elements that focuses on Charlotte and

Jennie's gendered experiences, and the appearance of the monstrous feminine during the film's genre shift and resolution work together to turn viewer's attention away from Thomas' statement on the stunted position patriarchy grants to men. Both female characters overtly struggle with their limited power as women, often calling into question their restricted social and financial options. John, however, struggles silently.

The film hints at its ultimate claim on gender relations from the onset. The move from Gilman's female-centered narrative to Thomas' male-centered one proves not to be a misogynistic effort when so much of the narrative revolves around John's emotional responses. Only in solitude or with a close male friend does John show emotion or discuss his feelings concerning the loss of his daughter and his wife's subsequent breakdown. The female primary characters push the boundaries of proper female behavior, negotiating a space previously unavailable to women. Charlotte writes "The Yellow Wallpaper," and both women feel comfortable sporadically deriding John. John, meanwhile, is very wooden and stoic around them, careful to never show fear or grief, to remain "reasonable if not logical." Some may say that Cushing has poorly acted his role due to his forced portrayal of John, but his performance in those few scenes where John breaks the mold of masculinity serve to explain that John is performing male behavior as society expects, perhaps unsuccessfully.

As the genre ultimately switches to Horror, Charlotte embodies the monstrous feminine, a woman who is also a vampire. Vampires' and women's corresponding connection with blood and the abilities to give and take life make vampirism a fitting choice of monster for his heroine.[49] The choice also explains that, in a biological sense, women have always had power. The power to create life suggests that any attempt to oppress women is doomed to eventual failure. The true horror of Thomas' work should be felt by patriarchy as an institution. However, this institution still has a hold on subduing men. In their two final scenes together, Charlotte tells John that she is sorry for acting foolishly. A reading of the film as misogynist would claim that these scenes act as an apology for feminism and reassurance that paternalism benefits women. In light of John's struggles where the women are free to explore, if not complete freedom, vaster modes of expressing themselves fully, these apologies function to express sorrow for feminism leaving men behind to struggle with the boundaries of strictly defined masculinity. As the film concludes, viewers never see Charlotte as a vampire, proving again that this film is not about her transformative experiences. She subverts patriarchy, and John assumes the role of her guardian and feeder, bringing unsuspecting tenants to the house as Hendricks did for van Wakefield. In the final frame, John stands with his back against the wallpaper which, using the palimpsest of Gilman straight on for the first time, symbolizes patriarchal control. This scene suggests that men have been confined to continuing the act patriarchy demands, unable to crawl through its complex designs or tear it down as women have. Thus, the true horror of the film is not directed toward women or patriarchy but toward men whose suffering has not yet received the attention that recent intersectional feminism has given to women.

Conclusions

Mainstream feminism promoted by middle- and upper-class, white, straight, Christian women in the West, has been challenged in recent decades for having a limited mission toward helping already privileged women. Women of color, poor and/or uneducated women, queer and trans women, non-Christian women, and women from across borders have changed the narrow perspective of the mainstream

[49] The turn to vampire also calls back to Gilman's text. As the narrator discovers the woman living in the wallpaper, she tracks her nocturnal movements, stating "most women do not creep by daylight" ("The Yellow Wallpaper" 342). As a vampire, the film's Charlotte can no longer go out in daylight.

movement. Even in the realm of Gilman critics, "virtually all feminist discourse on 'The Yellow Wallpaper' has come from white academics and…has failed to question the story's status as a universal woman's text" (Lanser 423). Yet, even generally, very few approach the topic of male experiences under patriarchy in holistic ways that do not position men as willful dominators, guaranteeing that feminism remains a women's liberation movement. Thomas' film directs attention to this oversight by highlighting the misery that John feels as "a good man," a label Jennie bestows upon him, in a system of hierarchy. Feminism will continue to languish as a movement for a specific minority (e.g., privileged white women) unless it addresses the needs of all those that must be liberated from heteropatriarchy.

Gilman and Thomas provide complementary texts that, when partnered, offer a well-rounded critical approach to a two-gendered power structure. Carol Margaret Davison argues that Gilman's text "not only haunts the predominantly male Gothic tradition in America but is, itself, haunted by that tradition" as the author lends a female voice with female concerns to a genre dominated by figures like "Brockden Brown, Poe, and Hawthorne" (49). More than a century later, Logan answers her palimpsestuously. Like other "analogous" adaptations, Logan's "willful infidelity [to Gilman's text is] in fact the very point: adaptations [interrogate] the political and ideological underpinnings of their source texts, translating works across cultural, gender, racial, and sexual boundaries to secure cultural space for marginalized discourses" (Murray 10). It is no wonder that Gilman's analysis on the repercussions of patriarchal oppression of women would receive a response concerning the patriarchal limitations placed on men after Masculinity Studies became an area of study in its own right. Historically, mainstream feminism has constructed a hegemonic layering, "an essentially false and problematic 'male' system beneath which essentially true and unproblematic 'female' essences can be recovered—just as the figure of the woman can presumably be recovered from beneath the patriarchal pattern" on the narrator's wall (Lanser 422). The film's final frame likewise depicts that John is perhaps not trapped within the wallpaper but is nonetheless trapped within a violent—and vampiric—system that stifles him.

In effect, Thomas' reliance on palimpsest functions to upset audience expectations of genre and thematic message. His adaptation of "The Yellow Wallpaper" provides startling shifts in narration and genre to promote a social message that often gets lost concerning men and the emotional unrest caused by inflexible confines of traditional masculinity. Gilman's text and its popularity provide a set of expectations from which Thomas' film and message can flourish, providing something new while offering familiarity in setting, tone, and the presence of Gilman herself. In sum, Thomas' text works well by distracting viewers with transcoded features like the shift in plot, narrative voice, and medium, presuming that they will suspect a thematic message which relates to or corresponds with Gilman's own. However, the hidden shift in genre needs to be acknowledged first. Only then should readers wonder what the transcoding in plot, narrative voice, medium, and genre/s have to say about 2012's social anxieties over gender relationships and performativity. The film's two genres—one assumed and one true—add layers to Thomas' social commentary, layers with "back-somersault[s]" and "florid arabesque[s]" like Gilman's famous wallpaper (Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" 340).

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